



EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF THE EASO-ITALY OPERATING PLAN 2021

FINAL REPORT

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ACRONYMS AND DEFINITIONS

Acronym	Definition
ALFa	<i>Accogliere Le Fragilità</i> (Welcoming fragility project)
AMIF	Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund
AST	Asylum support team
CARA	<i>Centro di Accoglienza per Richiedenti Asilo</i> (Reception centre for asylum applicants)
CAS	<i>Centro di Accoglienza Straordinaria</i> (Emergency reception centre)
CEAS	Common European Asylum System
CDM	Complementary deployment mechanism
COI	Country of origin information
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
CPA	<i>Centro di Prima Accoglienza</i> (First reception centre)
CSO	Civil society organisation
DU	Dublin Unit
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
EU	European Union
EUAA	European Union Agency for Asylum
Frontex	European Border and Coast Guard Agency
GCCA	<i>Gestione Centrale Controllo Accoglienza</i> (Central office for the monitoring of reception)
ICARE	Integration and Community Care for Asylum and Refugees in an Emergency
IO	Immigration Office
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IP	International protection
IT	Information technology
MedCOI	Medical country of origin information
MoI DCLI	Ministry of Interior – Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration

MoI DPS	Ministry of Interior – Department of Public Security
MoI NAC	Ministry of Interior – National Asylum Commission
MoI TC	Ministry of Interior – Territorial Commissions
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OP	Operating plan
RISO	Reception and Information System Officers
SAI	<i>Sistema di Accoglienza e Integrazione</i> (System for reception and integration)
SAR	Search and rescue
SGA	<i>Sistema per la Gestione dell'Accoglienza</i> (Reception monitoring system)
SOGI	Sexual orientation and gender identity
SSM	<i>Scuola Superiore della Magistratura</i> (School for the Judiciary)
SUA	<i>Sistema Unico d'Asilo</i> (Single Asylum System)
THB	Trafficking in human beings
UAMs	Unaccompanied minors
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past years, Italy has been confronted with a rapidly changing migratory situation, with the COVID-19¹ pandemic significantly affecting arrivals since 2020 and creating new challenges for the management of asylum and reception procedures. In this context and building on several years of support, the European Asylum Support Office² (**EASO**)-**Italy operating plan (OP) 2021 sought to:**

- Enhance quality and standardisation of access to asylum procedures;
- Enhance access to the asylum procedure and improve timely coordination between the main stakeholders, including in emergency situations such as search and rescue (SAR) disembarkation events and voluntary relocations;
- Enhance quality and standardisation of the Dublin procedure and asylum determination procedures;
- Improve capacity of the Italian asylum system in managing the relevant judicial backlog;
- Enhance quality and sustainability of the reception system, including management and monitoring, for adults and unaccompanied minors (UAMs);
- Improve capacity of the Italian authorities to efficiently reduce information and practice gaps among concerned authorities as well as to manage and monitor the asylum and reception system through enhanced and integrated information systems.

EASO's operational support to Italy in 2021 was highly **relevant to the needs of stakeholders and challenges at national level** during the evaluation period. The OP was designed following a needs assessment. It thus seamlessly addressed these needs at the time of its adoption and continued to address most problems and challenges arising throughout the year. On the other hand, the evaluation found that more could be done to support the need for timely identification of vulnerable applicants and strengthening of their referral and intake in reception centres, as well as to improve information provision.

The intervention was **effective, although with different levels of achievement** across different measures. Common challenges to all measures were the difficulties related to available human resources, the increased workload and pressure on the Italian asylum and reception system due to increase of sea arrivals and asylum applications, and the challenges related to COVID-19.

- EASO helped to further **enhance the quality and standardisation of access to asylum procedures**, and effectively supported the Department of Public Security (DPS), including by providing coaching and training sessions.
- EASO gave a great contribution to the activities in relation to the **registration of asylum applications**.
- EASO **contributed to the enhancement of the capacities of the National Asylum Commission** (NAC) concerning cessation and revocation cases, country of origin information (COI) activities, financial and procurement activities, and of the Dublin Unit (DU) in managing and processing Dublin outgoing requests and transfers.
- Although the backlog of pending cases is still significant, **EASO managed to achieve very good results in improving the capacity of the courts** (specialised sections of tribunals, Court of Cassation and General Prosecutor's Office) to manage it.

¹ Coronavirus Disease 2019.

² On 19 January 2022, EASO became the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), when Regulation (EU) 2021/2303 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 December 2021 on the European Union Agency for Asylum and repealing Regulation (EU) No 439/2010 (hereinafter: **EUAA Regulation**) entered into force. However, as this is a retrospective evaluation of 2021, the Agency is referred to as EASO, as was its official name during 2021.

- **EASO's support improved the capacity of authorities to manage reception procedures** and provided them with the methodological and organisational tools for planning and monitoring.
- Finally, the **planned IT system could not be established** due to factors external to EASO's control, notably delays in the testing phase of the system.

In the context of **voluntary relocation, EASO fulfilled its role although with some limitations** due to challenges largely outside of EASO's control, namely in relation to a limited number of pledges offered by Member States, the COVID-19 restrictive measures and issues in the deployment of human resources. **EASO effectively supported the coordination of SAR disembarkation events and voluntary relocation exercises**, including by maintaining an effective communication flow, based on a continuous exchange of information between central and local level. All SAR events for which assistance was requested by the Italian authorities were successfully supported.

Financial resources were efficiently spent to deliver the outputs and outcomes set out in the OP. Moreover, the activities and budget were adapted to respond to emerging needs during the year. The main challenge related to a shortage in human resources, notably due to constraints imposed by the restrictive expert deployment framework resulting in a reduction of the planned deployments and impacting the implementation and efficiency of the intervention. EASO did what it could to mitigate the challenges, but they were largely outside of its control.

The **measures of the OP 2021 were coherent, interlinked and complementary**, and in line with the priorities identified in the needs assessment. The **OP 2021 was also coherent with other European Union (EU) interventions**, including through the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF).

The evaluation found that there was an added value resulting from the 2021 intervention compared to what could have been achieved in its absence. **EASO is highly regarded** by all stakeholders consulted and its **operational support to Italy in 2021 was highly valued** by national authorities as they rely on it, especially to design high quality methodologies and tools, monitor procedures and establish standards. Its role in relation to coordination was also recognised as an EU added value, as the intervention encouraged coordination, exchange of information and good practices among national authorities.

It is difficult to assess if all outcomes are sustainable, but examples of **sustainable outcomes were identified**. They include: the development of methodologies, guidelines, quality assurance tools, workflows and standards which should remain in the stakeholders' structures in the future; the development of cooperation instruments monitoring mechanisms; the organisation or facilitation of training sessions, thematic sessions, coaching activities and roundtables which increase the capacity of partners.

Based on the above key findings, the following recommendations have been proposed:

Recommendation 1: Support the timely identification of vulnerable applicants and strengthen their referral and intake in reception centres

The timely identification of vulnerable applicants and the referral mechanism could be improved by implementing capacity building activities for relevant national authorities and non-governmental organisations providing information at border/transit zones or reception centres; organising coordination meetings and deploying human resources in support to pre-identification/screening of vulnerability indicators at Immigration Offices (IOs) and disembarkations; identifying existing good practices, looking at the work already done in the area of information provision in Italy (for example by International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)).

Recommendation 2: Improve support to information provision, especially in emergency situations

EASO could further provide operational support and improve the delivery of information provision, including but not limited to the area of voluntary relocation, by deploying additional human resources, including at disembarkations and reception centres; implementing capacity building activities for relevant authorities/non-governmental organisations (NGOs); producing additional informative material, and/or adjusting current ones; identifying existing good practices, looking at the work already done in the area of info provision in Italy (for example by IOM and UNHCR).

Recommendation 3: Increase support to SAR disembarkation events and voluntary relocations, provided that such a need arises

There is the possibility of a future sudden rise in the number of arrivals. If that is the case, the support to SAR disembarkation events and voluntary relocation exercises should be further increased. This could be done by increasing the number of stable dedicated resources for registrations and other functional activities related to SAR disembarkation and voluntary relocation activities, and organising coordination activities involving relevant stakeholders and support information provision specifically on voluntary relocation at disembarkation.

Recommendation 4: Strengthen the DCLI Dublin Unit monitoring capacity of litigation cases

It is recommended that EASO prioritise the development of a tool that can support the efficient management of litigation cases, for instance for tracking deadlines, and monitoring progress in litigation phase. Moreover, it is recommended to deploy additional dedicated trained human resources, following the end of the current AMIF staff's contract, in support to the management of the incoming Dublin caseload (currently managed by AMIF) as well as to organise coaching on the job activities for new Dublin officials.

Recommendation 5: Simplify the results indicators database

Given the complexity of the monitoring intervention logic adopted by EASO, and the large number of indicators established, it is recommended that EASO simplify the results framework to enhance measurability of actions. This could be done for example by reducing the number of indicators and/or avoiding overlaps and duplications of indicators between measures.

Recommendation 6: Considering a phase-out plan regarding the support to the judiciary

Given the additional human resources which will be deployed under the Recovery Fund and considering the good results achieved under measure 3, EASO should consider a medium-term phase-out plan regarding the support to the judiciary.

1. EVALUATION OBJECTIVES AND CONTEXT

1.1 Objectives and scope

This report provides an *ex post* evaluation of the Operating Plan (OP) agreed between the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) and Italy for 2021 (hereinafter: EASO-Italy OP 2021, or OP 2021). It offers a retrospective, reflective and objective assessment of the degree to which the OP 2021 objectives have been met, identifying the reasons for any shortcomings and suggesting lessons learned from the intervention that might be useful to EASO in the design and implementation of future interventions.

The scope of the exercise concerns EASO's operational support to Italy during 2021. For contextual reasons the report also considers previous OPs and historical migration and asylum statistics, as well as the already ongoing OP 2022-2024.

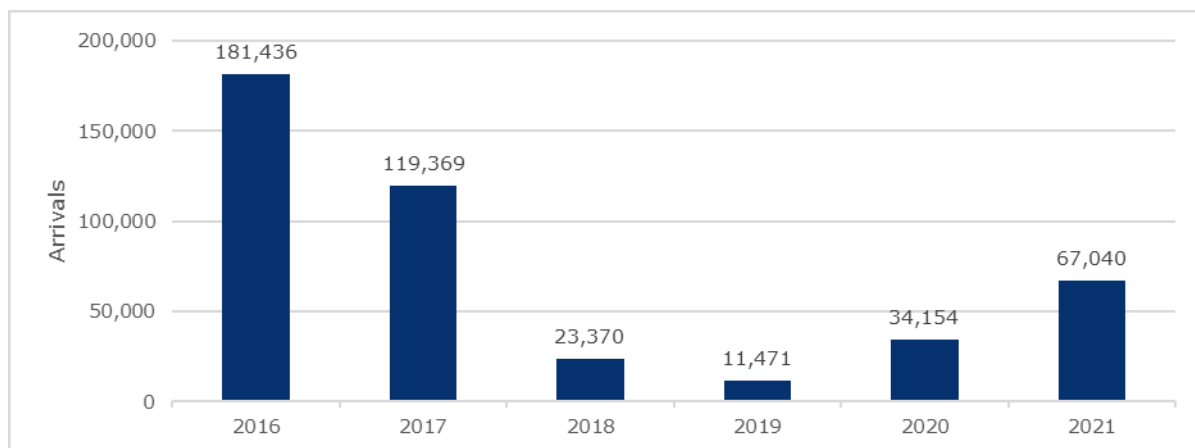
1.2 Background

1.2.1 Asylum and reception trends in Italy

Over the past years, Italy has been **confronted with a rapidly changing migratory situation**, with the COVID-19 pandemic significantly affecting arrivals since 2020 and creating new challenges for the management of asylum and reception procedures. Italy has also experienced several changes in the national policy and legislative framework in the field of asylum and migration which inevitably affected migration flows, policies and practices.

The influx of migrants disembarked in Italy decreased from 181,436 in 2016 to 11,471 in 2019 (see Figure 1). It subsequently increased to 34,000 in 2020 and 67,040 in 2021.³ Although the influxes in recent years were below the peaks experienced during 2014-2017, the Italian asylum and reception system is still facing high pressure.

Figure 1. Arrivals, Italy, 2016-2021



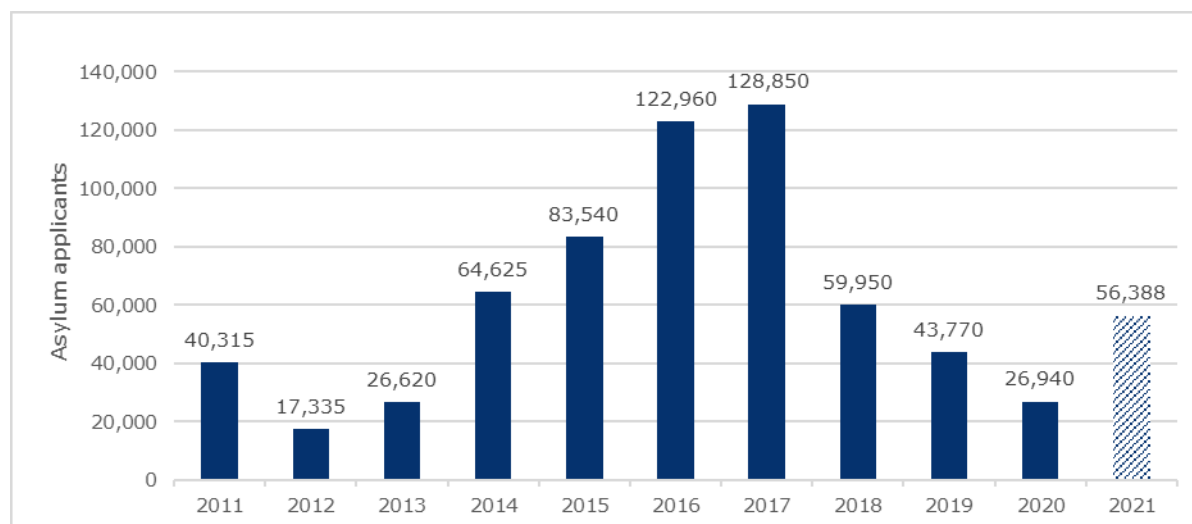
Source: Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration ([DCLI statistics](#))

Fluctuating trends and changes concerned the number of **applications for international protection** (IP). After an increase of applications lodged in Italy between 2012 and 2017, the

³ [DCLI statistics](#).

number of applicants started to decrease from 2018 onwards (see Figure 2). In 2020, as a result of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated mobility restrictions, Italy was back in line with its pre-migratory crisis level with a total of 26,940 applications lodged.⁴ In 2021 the trend changed again, with 56,388 asylum applications lodged in Italy until December 2021,⁵ marking the first increase after three consecutive years of reductions. Pakistan, Bangladesh, Tunisia and Afghanistan were the main four country of origin of applicants in Italy.⁶

Figure 2. Asylum applications, Italy, 2011-2021⁷



Source: Eurostat asylum statistics (2011-2020); DCLI⁸ (2021)

The number of IP applicants in Italy in addition to those awaiting a decision on their application is therefore still large, implying a significant effort of the country to ensure applicants' first- and second- line reception, and their early integration.

Several changes have been also seen at first instance in the last three years. While the **backlog of asylum applications** pending a final decision in **first instance** decreased in 2019 compared to previous years, also thanks to past EASO intervention, it increased again from the second half of 2020 and in 2021 with a total of 32,800 pending cases (an increase of 30% compared to 2020).⁹ With regard to **second instance** pending cases, as of December 2020 they amounted to 99 340,¹⁰ and in 2021 they further increased,¹¹ making it challenging for the specialised sections of the

⁴ An inter-ministerial decree issued on 7 April 2020 closed Italian ports for the entire duration of the national health emergency as they were not compliant with the "place of safety concept" for the rescue operations implemented by foreigner boats outside the Italian SAR zone. On 12 April, another decree was issued establishing the procedures for quarantine measures and the surveillance period upon disembarkation of individuals arrived autonomously to Italian coasts and those rescued outside the Italian SAR zone. Data extracted from Eurostat statistics, available at <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00191/default/table?lang=en>

⁵ [DCLI statistics](#), 2021.

⁶ [DCLI statistics](#), 2021.

⁷ Note that 2021 data was taken from a different source and has not yet been officially validated through the Eurostat process.

⁸ [DCLI statistics](#), 2021.

⁹ [DCLI statistics](#), 2021.

¹⁰ Data from Ministry of Justice, Central Directorate for Statistics and Organisational Analysis (*Direzione Statistica ed Analisi Organizzativa*), latest update 4 March 2021.

¹¹ Based on needs assessment 2021.

tribunals to meet the 4-month timeframe envisaged by the law 46/2017 of 13 April 2017 for the definition of judicial proceedings.¹² The backlog at the Court of Cassation has also seen an increase in cases since 2017, as the right to appeal a second instance decision to the Court of Appeal has been abolished with the law 46/2017. In 2017, 300 cases were registered. This increased to 10,366 cases in 2019 and 3,679 cases in 2021.¹³

Moreover, at the end of December 2021, 78,421 persons were registered within the entire **reception system** in Italy; a majority in first line reception centres (i.e., *Centro di Accoglienza Straordinaria* (CAS) and *Centro di Prima Accoglienza* (CPA) and a smaller presence within second line reception system.¹⁴ Since the end of 2018 when 135,858 persons were accommodated, there has been a clear decreasing trend in the number of persons in the reception system.¹⁵ Increased arrivals in summer 2021, distancing and other health measures due to COVID-19 added further pressure on the reception system.

The health emergency also affected the management of **Dublin transfers**,¹⁶ **voluntary relocations**,¹⁷ as well as resettlements, humanitarian corridors and evacuations, as all transfers were suspended in early 2020 and have since then only resumed at a slowed pace, triggering a backlog in transfers and affecting Dublin-related judicial proceedings.

1.2.2 EASO's support to Italy

EASO has been providing operational support to Italy since 2013. The support has gradually evolved over the years, shifting from support with the day-to-day work of the asylum and reception authorities: National Asylum Commission (NAC) and Territorial Commissions (TCs), Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration (DCLI), Dublin unit (DU) and Department of Public Security (DPS) Immigration Offices (IOs), towards more structural support through e.g., capacity building, train-the-trainer programmes and supporting the coordination between authorities. By 2020, the support was primarily concerned with improving quality management and monitoring, and training of trainers to ensure the sustainability of results. Moreover, EASO provided support with search and rescue (SAR) disembarkation and voluntary relocation events and related registrations of applicants for international protection through the EASO Mobile Team.

EASO's operational support to Italy in 2021 continued to build on the results achieved in 2020, focusing on quality and standardisation of registration procedures, and on second instance (appeals) procedures. It also provided broader support to the reception system, especially at field level, and responded to SAR disembarkation and voluntary relocation events. The OP contained six measures, with the following intended results:

- **Measure IT1.A:** Enhanced quality and standardisation of access to asylum procedures;
- **Measure IT1.B:** Enhanced access to the asylum procedure and improved timely coordination between the main stakeholders, including in emergency situations such as SAR disembarkation events and voluntary relocations;

¹² Norms on asylum procedures and detention of irregular migrants, available at https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/law-462017-norms-asylum-procedures-and-detention-irregular-migrants_en

¹³ [Court of Cassation statistics](#), 2022.

¹⁴ [DCLI statistics](#), 2021.

¹⁵ Based on needs assessment 2021.

¹⁶ The volume of decisions on Dublin outgoing requests from Italy has reduced since 2018, due to the lower number of asylum applications between 2018 and 2020. Between January and July 2021, the vast majority of the 1390 Dublin requests were based on take-back requests. Based on needs assessment.

¹⁷ Although a 4-weeks' timeframe – from landing to transfer in competent Member State – is foreseen for the completion of the voluntary relocation procedure, exercises carried on in 2020 and 2021 required longer processing times based on needs assessment.

- **Measure IT2:** Enhanced quality and standardisation of the Dublin procedure and asylum determination procedures;
- **Measure IT3:** Improved capacity of the Italian asylum system in managing the relevant judicial backlog;
- **Measure IT4:** Enhanced quality and sustainability of the reception system, including management and monitoring, for adults and unaccompanied minors (UAMs);
- **Measure IT5:** Improved capacity of the Italian authorities to efficiently reduce information and practice gaps among concerned authorities as well as to manage and monitor the asylum and reception system through enhanced and integrated information systems.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Evaluation questions

The evaluation questions this report sought to answer are based on the requirements for evaluations of the European Commission’s Better Regulation Guidelines but tailored to the OP and specific elements of interest to EASO. Specifically, one priority evaluation question related to voluntary relocation was included (see Table 1). A more detailed overview of the questions is presented in the evaluation matrix in Annex 2.

Table 1. Evaluation questions

Evaluation criterion	Questions
Relevance	Were the objectives of the OP 2021 relevant to the needs of stakeholders in Italy, including in light of any changes encountered during 2021?
Effectiveness	To what extent were the intended results of the OP 2021 achieved? What factors helped or hindered the achievements and how did EASO cope with any challenges? Priority question: In the context of voluntary relocation, has EASO been able to fulfil its role? Why/why not? What factors enabled/inhibited it doing so?
Efficiency	Were the costs incurred for the intervention proportionate compared to the achieved results? Is there any scope to increase efficiency in the future?
Coherence	Is the intervention consistent with / complementary to other actions by Member States, international organisations that have similar objectives?
EU added value	What is the additional value resulting from EASO’s activities, compared to what could be achieved by Member States at national and/or regional levels?
Sustainability	What is the likelihood that the results of the intervention in Italy will be sustained, and what mechanisms were introduced to ensure this?

2.2 Methodological approach

The evaluation of EASO’s support to Italy combined the use of quantitative and qualitative data to enable an in-depth assessment of the results of the interventions. Data collection consisted of the following activities:

Desk research

A broad selection of relevant documents for the evaluation were shared by EASO which were analysed and relied on for the evaluation. Additional desk research was carried out to identify further relevant documents, including latest statistics on the asylum situation in Italy.

In-depth interviews

Key informant interviews served to complement the already available evidence by exploring not only *what* has happened but also *how* and *why* certain results were or were not (fully) achieved. A total of **10 interviews** were conducted, including with the European Commission, EASO management team and staff responsible for the implementation, national authorities (DCLI, including DU, Office II, second line reception and UAMs (former Mission Structure for unaccompanied minors)¹⁸, DPS, NAC, European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) and IOM.

2.3 Limitations to the robustness of the evidence base

One key limitation to the robustness of the methodology was the COVID-19 pandemic, which did not allow free movement in the country for field visits and in-person interviews. Such in-person consultations might have allowed to understand more in-depth qualitative data and to collect a wider range of feedback.

Another challenge was the complexity of the monitoring intervention logic adopted by EASO, and specifically the large number of indicators established that often did not, or not clearly enough, envisage baselines or targets which could provide reliable data for the purposes of the evaluation.

3. EVALUATION FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of the evaluation of the EASO-Italy OP 2021, based on all the information gathered and analysed from primary and secondary sources. These include results from the review of monitoring data and existing evidence, and interviews. The findings are structured along the evaluation questions presented above.

3.1 Relevance

Overall, **the EASO-Italy OP 2021 has been highly relevant to the needs of stakeholders, trends and challenges** at national level during the evaluation period. The intervention was relevant at the time of its adoption, and it continued to address most problems and needs arising throughout 2021, responding to the need for continuity from the previous OP. This is confirmed by all stakeholders interviewed, who highlighted the relevance of the objectives to meet their needs.

Following EASO Project Cycle Management methodology, the EASO Italy Sector initiated a needs assessment exercise aimed at defining the priority needs for the OP 2021 in mid-2020. Based on the findings, five priority areas of intervention were identified. These priority needs corresponded and were well covered by each of the measures of the OP 2021.

On the other hand, the evaluation found that, although not included in the OP 2021, more could be done to support the need for the timely identification of vulnerable applicants, which is especially evident in the access to the asylum procedure phase, as well as to ensure adequate information provision. The analysis of the relevance of the different measures is presented in the subsequent sections.

¹⁸ Ufficio II: Seconda accoglienza e minori stranieri non accompagnati.

3.1.1 Measure 1.A: Support to the quality and standardisation of access to asylum procedures Measure 1.B: Support to timely and standardised registration of asylum procedures

Measures 1.A and 1.B covered the priority area 'Support to the quality and standardisation of asylum procedures, including support to SAR disembarkation'. Building on the support already provided by EASO in 2020, this priority envisaged two main areas of intervention. The first one aiming at increasing the quality of registration procedures across the national territory, and the second one focusing on the management of the migratory flows of IP applicants, by ensuring equal access to procedures, especially in emergency situations, as well as on the timely coordination mechanism with the main actors involved in the asylum procedures.

In line with the identified areas of intervention, measures 1.A and 1.B **well addressed the challenges and trends related to the access to asylum procedures and were highly relevant to the needs of stakeholders** throughout 2021.

Despite the overall declining trend in arrivals in recent years, an increased number of migrants disembarked in Italy in 2021 and, coupled with the COVID-19 related health measures (e.g., quarantine in equipped ships) has put the Italian system for processing asylum requests under high pressure. The number of IP applicants, in addition to those awaiting a decision on their application, was therefore still high in 2021. This required a significant effort from the national actors involved to ensure timely access to asylum procedures, including in emergency situations such as SAR disembarkation events, first- and second- line reception, as well as to establish a consolidated mechanism of coordination, which is essential for the effective and efficient management of the asylum system.

Measures 1.A and 1.B responded to these needs as they focused on supporting the asylum procedures, by on the one hand enhancing the quality of registration procedures and Dublin transfers through (a) the development and dissemination of tools for the DPS self-assessment of the quality of the registration procedures; (b) the organisation of national training sessions; (c) the development of training materials on the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) for the Police School and (d) the implementation of the Helpdesk on Procedures and Dublin transfers. On the other hand, such measures improved the timely lodging of IP applications, including in emergency situations such as SAR disembarkation events, increased flows of arrivals and voluntary relocations, as well as timely coordination mechanism with the main actors involved in the asylum procedures (including voluntary relocation, humanitarian corridor and evacuations) for the timely finalisation of the procedures.

These objectives and activities were appropriate to meet the needs of the stakeholders as the intervention aimed at providing the organisations it supported (DPS including IOs, DCLI, and DU) with the necessary resources to support the lodging of IP applications in border areas, entry points and other locations under particular pressure; ad hoc coaching and training; capacity building activities to implement Dublin transfers,¹⁹ as well as support with voluntary relocation exercises. According to the interviewed stakeholders, EASO's intervention was highly relevant and was therefore considered suitable to meet their needs.

During interviews, some stakeholders²⁰ indicated that it could have been beneficial for EASO to provide support for the timely identification of vulnerable applicants, especially in the access to the asylum procedure phase, as this was not included in the OP 2021. Vulnerabilities are identified only through informal mechanisms, which rely on the capacity of local actors to timely respond to the needs. Vulnerable asylum applicants are therefore often not identified or only identified after having been in the asylum procedure for a long period of time. Moreover, it was indicated that information

¹⁹ Such as translation and dissemination of policy and technical documents, organisation of workshops on specific topics.

²⁰ Interviews with international stakeholders and EASO staff.

provision about asylum procedures was a bit challenging in the last two years, including due to the COVID-19 situation and the limited support personnel ensuring information provision already at disembarkation.

3.1.2 Measure 2: Support to the quality and standardisation of the Dublin procedure and asylum determination procedures

Measure 2 covered the priority area 'Support to the determination procedures', which aimed at supporting the NAC in the reduction of the average time for the implementation of the revocation and cessation procedures and at developing an inter-ministerial Country of Origin Information (COI) Unit. It also aimed at improving the capacity of DU officials in case management and in timely and correct implementation of Dublin transfers.

In line with the identified areas of intervention and building on the support already provided in 2020, measure 2 **very well addressed the challenges related to the standardisation of the Dublin and asylum determination procedures and was highly relevant to the needs of stakeholders** throughout the implementation period.

Due to the large number of Dublin cases and the difficulties in the implementation of transfer of applicants due to COVID-19, the DU was under high pressure in 2021 to process files, which was magnified by the burden to relocate asylum applicants arriving through SAR disembarkations included in the voluntary relocation programme. Measure 2 very well addressed these challenges and needs as it focused on supporting the DU to manage and process Dublin requests and transfers, monitor litigation cases, including by developing monitoring tools to track timeline and data.

Additionally, the measure covered the need for continuity in the support of NAC capacity, in particular concerning cessation and revocation case management, due to the structural delays in processing these files which was causing a backlog.²¹

The measure also met the need to support the COI Unit in strengthening the decision-making process, which was addressed by including under the related sub-measure capacity building activities and other actions to improve the exchange of information and good practices with other European COI Units.

3.1.3 Measure 3: Support to the management of judicial backlog

Measure 3 covered the priority area 'Support the reduction of backlog of second instance asylum cases in the specialised sections of tribunals, Court of Cassation and General Prosecutor's Office'. Building on the support already provided by EASO in 2020, measure 3 aimed at providing operational and technical assistance to specialised courts (specialised sections of tribunals, Court of Cassation²² and General Prosecutor's Office²³) for the reduction of backlog at second instance.

In line with the identified areas of intervention and building on the support already provided by EASO in 2020, measure 3 **very well addressed these challenges related to the management of judicial backlog and was highly relevant to the needs of stakeholders** throughout 2021.

According to the latest statistics,²⁴ 56% of applicants for international protection were refused any form of protection by the first instance bodies in 2021. Because of this, the specialised sections of

²¹ EASO internal operational monitoring.

²² The Court of Cassation is the highest grade of the ordinary jurisdiction and ensures the observance and a harmonised interpretation of the law.

²³ The General Prosecutor's Office at the Court of Cassation is the highest grade among local Prosecutors and cooperates with the Court of Cassation in ensuring a harmonised interpretation of the law.

²⁴ [DCLI statistics](#), 2021.

tribunals, competent for second instance appeal, and the Court of Cassation, competent for third instance claims (only for appeals on points of law), were overwhelmed by a considerable number of claims.²⁵ Despite the contingency measures adopted by the Court's administration to tackle this pressure, in 2021,²⁶ just like in 2020, there was a clear need for a further reduction of backlog in pending cases.

Measure 3 very well addressed these challenges and needs as it focused on a) supporting the specialised sections of the tribunals by providing technical assistance to the management and processing of judicial backlog, therefore improving the timeframe in which decisions are taken; b) supporting the management of judicial backlog of both Court of Cassation and General Prosecutor's Office by enhancing standardisation and uniformity of practices; c) strengthening internal coordination and enhancing specialisation in the field of international protection of judicial authorities, in coordination with the *Scuola Superiore della Magistratura (SSM)*.

These objectives were appropriate to meet the needs of the stakeholders as the intervention aimed at providing the judicial authorities with trained human resources, professional development and capacity building activities to help them manage the relevant judicial backlog and ensure coordination within the judiciary system.

3.1.4 Measure 4: Support to the quality management and monitoring of the Italian reception system

Building on the support already provided by EASO in 2020, measure 4 covered the priority area 'Support the quality management and monitoring of the Italian reception system', which aimed at supporting the operational and financial central management of the Italian reception system, including through the alignment of its monitoring framework with the EASO operational standards and indicators.

The support from EASO under measure 4 was considered **highly relevant and corresponded to the needs of the stakeholders as well as to the trends and challenges faced by the reception system.**

This measure very well responded to the needs that arose following the increased arrivals of migrants by sea and the COVID-19 outbreak and its related containment procedures, which have put the Italian reception system under pressure, with a significant impact on the management of the reception system and on the quality of services provided. The increased number of persons registered within the reception system, coupled with the implementation of new containment procedures (i.e., health surveillance, 14-day quarantine in equipped ships or in specific designated areas suitable for isolation), had a significant impact on transfers and allocation of migrants in first line shelters managed by the DCLI. Similar impacts and procedures also concern transfer and allocation of newly arrived UAMs. Moreover, in accordance with the containment measures, available second line shelters of the *Sistema di Accoglienza e Integrazione (SAI)* network were hosting IP applicants despite the fact that they should only host beneficiaries of IP, UAMs and specific groups.²⁷ In light of this, and of the new Legislative Decree 130/2020²⁸ reforming reception

²⁵ Risoluzione sulle linee guida in materia di immigrazione, protezione internazionale e libera circolazione dei cittadini dell'Unione Europea. Available at 3862cd63-58ee-4d97-bd1d-30684764b3c1 (csm.it)

²⁶ For instance, an open competition was launched in August 2021 to recruit more than 8,000 officers in view of the establishment of the "Ufficio del Processo" under the Ministry of Justice. Source: <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/concorsi/caricaDettaglioAtto/originario?atto.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=2021-08-06&atto.codiceRedazionale=21E09052>

²⁷ So called *casi speciali*.

²⁸ [Legislative Decree 130/2020](#) reforming reception system.

system and including IP applicants in the new SAI, the DCLI continued to face an important workload for the management and monitoring of the reception system.

Against this backdrop, the support from EASO was considered highly relevant and corresponded to the needs of DCLI. The support started already in 2020, when the intervention focused more on the quality management strand, while the strand on the monitoring of reception conditions of centres was considered less relevant, as DCLI deprioritised its implementation in favour of responding to the immediate effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, EASO aimed at reinforcing the support previously offered by providing human resources in selected Prefectures to enhance the monitoring of sea arrivals, the timely registering and processing of data in the existing IT platform and monitoring transfers to reception centres. In continuity with the support provided since 2017, it also focused on strengthening capacities and coordination of authorities and relevant services across the territory to meet the special needs of UAMs, in implementation of the EU and Italian legislation.

3.1.5 Measure 5: Support to the coordination amongst Italian asylum authorities, including through the development of information systems

Measure 5 covered the priority 'Support the coordination mechanisms amongst the Italian asylum authorities and the efficiency and standardisation of procedures improving the information systems', with the aim to continue providing practical support to the coordination among the Italian authorities at the central and local level, notably DCLI, DPS and NAC, and extend it to reception authorities and the judiciary where necessary. This priority area intended also to confirm the support to the Italian authorities in finalising the implementation of the *Sistema Unico d'Asilo* (SUA) –, funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF).²⁹

Measure 5 responded to the need to establish a clear communication flow at central and regional or local levels among Italian asylum stakeholders. The current fragmentation in the Italian asylum and reception system affects both information systems and coordination mechanisms among stakeholders. A clear communication flow amongst the Italian asylum authorities is pivotal for the management and standardisation of asylum procedures. Similarly, the creation of an integrated information system would allow to have a single and coherent view of all the information regarding reception, IP, Dublin procedures, assisted voluntary return and management of funds for UAMs.

Therefore, this measure **adequately covered the need to support coordination mechanisms among the Italian asylum authorities** to foster harmonisation of asylum procedures at all phases. In particular, it aimed at supporting the Italian authorities in efficiently reducing information and practice gaps, through the establishment of ad hoc meetings and organisation of workshops, as well as managing and monitoring the asylum and reception systems **through enhanced and integrated information systems**. The establishment and proper functioning of such a system, and the use of information systems for asylum and reception management more broadly, are considered to be relevant to ensure efficiency and effectiveness of the asylum system and management in the country as well as to facilitate data availability and improve analyses and reporting.

As the evaluation of the OP 2020 also suggested, however, the timeframe envisaged for its implementation was not fit-for-purpose. Implementation challenges persisted during 2021, mostly related to significant delays, out of EASO's reach, in the development of SUA (see section 3.2.6). In line with this, EASO decided to stop the support to the development of SUA which is therefore not included in the OP 2022-2024.

²⁹ The SUA project notably aims at reorganising and upgrading the existing information systems (namely Vestanet, *Sistema per la Gestione dell'Accoglienza* (SGA) and Dublinet) into a new integrated IT system.

3.2 Effectiveness

Overall, EASO's operational support to Italy in 2021 **achieved several intended results, although with varying levels of success across different measures**. Although all measures were affected by issues in relation to the deployment of human resources, measures 3 and 4 were mostly implemented in line with what was planned for the OP 2021, while measures 1.A, 1.B, and 2 were partially implemented. Measure 5 was the farthest from reaching its targets, although due to factors external to EASO's control. Common challenges to all measures were the difficulties related to available resources and the increased workload and pressure on the Italian asylum and reception system, mostly due to the increase of arrivals and the COVID-19 related measures.

3.2.1 Measure 1.A: Support to the quality and standardisation of access to asylum procedures

Measure 1.A was affected by several challenges and limitations which impacted the full achievement of its objectives. First, the lack of EASO human resources at DPS and the limitations related to temporary workers contracts in Italy³⁰ had an impact not only on some activities, but also on the relationship with the stakeholder, which was relying on the continuity of EASO's support.³¹ Other factors which had a negative impact include the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused the unavailability of stakeholders³² and the suspension of many activities due to limitations to travel and social gatherings (e.g., some coaching missions did not take place), as well as the need for EASO's resources at DPS to alternate in order to ensure appropriate working space and conditions in line with COVID-19 precautionary measures, sometimes making the performance of tasks rather challenging. Despite these challenges, **EASO's support was crucial in enhancing the quality and standardisation of access to asylum procedures**, as also confirmed by the national stakeholders consulted. During interviews, EASO's support to the DPS was stressed to have significantly contributed to enhancing the quality of their work, including by developing clear methodologies and useful tools for Police IOs³³. EASO also supported the DPS in identifying and addressing needs for coaching and training, which significantly contributed to improve knowledge in the area of asylum.

Therefore, **the overall results of this measure were good and the output indicators were almost achieved**. While the key activities related to DPS Helpdesk procedures and DPS Helpdesk transfers (support to the Dublin Office) were achieved, as well as national training sessions and translations, coaching missions and Dublin workshops could not be implemented to the extent initially foreseen.

Support to the standardisation of registration procedures

The activities related to DPS Helpdesk procedures were on track during 2021, with 100% (instead of 80%) queries coming from IOs addressed and closed. On the other hand, coaching missions were affected by the reduction of human resources and therefore were put on hold at DPS' request and could only resume in December 2021: four IOs were reached through three coaching missions (against an agreed revised target of five). Nonetheless, EASO presented to the DPS a set of 11 quality tools resulting from coaching missions in 2020, which were highly appreciated and endorsed by DPS and further disseminated.

³⁰ National employment laws limit the deployment of temporary workers to 36 months without the possibility of renewal.

³¹ EASO internal operational monitoring; interviews with national stakeholders.

³² EASO internal operational monitoring.

³³ IOs are notably responsible for the registrations of IP requests.

Support to the centralised coordination and improvement of CEAS knowledge among DPS officials

National training sessions to be delivered by police officers with EASO's support and police school training modules on the CEAS were initially put on hold at DPS' request, mostly due to the reduction of human resources. In the second half of the year, the DPS green lighted resumption of work for the implementation of tailor-made training materials on the CEAS for trainers and templates for the development of such materials were completed (instead of the full development of two training materials). As for the national training sessions for the representatives of the IOs, the target was revised to three sessions, following DPS' request. These were indeed conducted in 2021, with another four scheduled in 2022, focusing on recent developments in national legislation (the revised target was therefore achieved).

Support to the improvement of DPS capacities to implement and finalise Dublin transfers

The activities related to DPS Helpdesk transfers (support to the Dublin Office) were on track during 2021, with 100% (instead of 80%) queries coming from IOs successfully addressed and closed. The monitoring transfers activity was found to be an effective tool to alert on time the involved IOs about the implementation of upcoming transfers. The coordination with DPS Dublin team was also positive, based on the regular meetings held during the year, through remote modalities or in presence. Dublin workshops on ad hoc topics on the Dublin procedure were first put on stand-by at DPS' request, due to the reduction of resources and other priorities, then resumed in November 2021: two workshops were organised instead of six, reaching 28% of IOs (instead of 90%). Regarding the translation of the recommendations of EASO Network of DUs on Dublin transfers, a revision of the documents to be translated was carried out at the beginning of the year. As a result, instead of the 3 recommendations related to Dublin procedures, as agreed with the stakeholder, other three documents were sent for translation. The target related to the translation of Dublin info provisions leaflets was achieved with three instead of two leaflets translated in 11 languages.

3.2.2 Measure 1.B: Support to timely and standardised registration of asylum procedures

Measure 1.B aimed at enhancing access to asylum procedures, including in emergency situations such as SAR disembarkation events and voluntary relocation, with a focus on registration and coordination activities. This measure was affected by several challenges which had an impact on its full implementation. Challenges included the lack of human resources and the limitations related to temporary workers contracts in Italy, the increase of arrivals³⁴ and IP applications, the COVID-19 preventive and restrictive measures which led to delays in processing requests and to the suspension of many activities. **Despite these challenges, EASO managed to achieve several key results:** it achieved the targets of registrations carried out, including thanks to the adoption of mitigation measures in relation to the issues with resources. In the context of voluntary relocation, EASO effectively supported the coordination of SAR disembarkation events for which support was requested by the Italian authorities, including by maintaining an effective communication flow, based on a continuous exchange of information between central and local level. On the other hand, several planned activities under this measure were suspended. **The overall results of this measure were good,** considering the challenges encountered.

³⁴ Including due to the situation in Afghanistan and the humanitarian evacuations organised by the Italian Ministry of Defence; thousands of Afghan nationals arrived in Italy in 2021, with a direct impact on the workload of some IOs.

Support to the management of migratory flows of IP applicants, ensuring timely access to the procedure

Overall, EASO was able to provide support in dealing with IP applications, both spontaneous applications and applications related to disembarkation events (voluntary relocation and accelerated procedures). To mitigate the reduction of EASO interim resources, the support was ensured through the temporary deployment of Registration Support Officers from EASO Cyprus Operations as well as Member State Experts in support not only to IOs, but also at disembarkation, to ensure timely lodging of applications, including for accelerated procedures. Some challenges were reported with these resources though, especially when they did not speak Italian and/or they were not familiar with the national procedures. By deploying additional human resources, EASO carried out 7,355 registrations in border areas, entry points and locations under particular pressure, thus exceeding the revised target set for 2021 (6000 registrations).³⁵ The majority of persons registered by EASO experts consisted of spontaneous presentations (46 %), followed closely by registrations made after disembarkation events (43 %). These numbers justify the focus on registrations from SAR disembarkations which was foreseen in the 2021 intervention.

Moreover, several training sessions for asylum support teams (ASTs) were organised, namely training on registration (4 sessions), identification of potential Dublin cases (3 sessions) and information provision and communication (4 sessions). Thematic sessions were also organised on registration procedures with a focus on vulnerability and accelerated procedures.

During interviews with EASO staff, it was indicated that there were challenges in relation to the absorption capacity of national authorities (e.g., IOs). Local authorities are often under pressure and have limited staff availability, which in turn increases the need for EASO's support.³⁶ Results thus depend not only on EASO's support but also on partners' capacity and flexibility.

On the other hand, several planned activities under this measure were suspended. For example, those related to regional registration hub(s) and remote registrations workflow were suspended due to the lack of human resources and of official endorsement from DPS and NAC (due to other stakeholders' priorities). From EASO's side, logistical and organisational steps were implemented to set up the hub in Bari.³⁷ Operational tools and guidelines on remote registration for applicants and reception centres involved in SARs were drafted but not implemented, mostly due to the above-mentioned limited human resources.

It was not possible to measure the first outcome indicator of this measure (percentage of applications remotely lodged following the standardised workflow), as the workflow for the remote lodging of applications was not endorsed by the national authorities in 2021 (due to other stakeholders' priorities).

Support to the coordination of SAR disembarkation events for timely finalisation of the procedures

The priority question for this evaluation examined the extent to which EASO was able to fulfil its role in the context of voluntary relocation and what factors enabled or inhibited it doing so.

By December 2021, EASO facilitated 100% of SAR disembarkation and voluntary relocation events following the request from the Italian authorities. Throughout the year, EASO supported asylum registrations of 40 (out of 44) SAR events disembarked. Support was also ensured for the last four events that occurred in the final weeks of December 2021, for which registration of IP applicants in

³⁵ EASO internal operational monitoring. Target of 6000 registrations of IP carried out by EASO's AST deployed in border areas, entry points and locations, including remote lodging and SAR events.

³⁶ Interview with EASO staff.

³⁷ EASO internal operational monitoring.

the voluntary relocation programme is planned for 2022, after the finalisation of the 14-day quarantine period.

A limited number of pledges for relocation was offered by Member States. Because of this, and considering the challenges in registering all applicants in various locations in the voluntary relocation programme, it was agreed with the Italian DU and DPS that from June 2021 registrations for voluntary relocation would take place in the *Centro di Accoglienza per Richiedenti Asilo* (CARA) of Bari³⁸ only, where channelling of applicants to the voluntary relocation programme was done automatically (unlike in the other IO locations where some of the applicants were transferred).

In Q3, EASO reported that voluntary relocation activities at the CARA of Bari were proceeding according to the plan, as the backlog was absorbed, and registrations proceeded smoothly, although with some exceptions due to temporary lack of human resources and technical issues.³⁹ In Q4 the backlog was increasing again, mostly due to the lack of stable resources deployed and the increase of arrivals. Another factor which negatively affected the registration process, especially in Q4, was the higher number of absconded applicants (perhaps due to lack of awareness and/or understanding of the voluntary relocation procedure) from the disembarkation and/or right after the transfer from the quarantine vessel to the CARA of Bari, with a consequent decrease of the number of registrations performed.

During interviews with EASO staff, it was indicated that the team supporting disembarkation events established and maintained an effective coordination and communication flow, based on a continuous exchange of information and on regular updates among staff at central (DCLI, DU) and local level (Prefectures, IOs). On the other hand, as already mentioned, this sub-measure was one of the most severely affected by the lack of or reduced human resources, which inevitably caused some disruptions of activities and suggests the need for a more stable support.

As for the other activities foreseen under this sub-measure, EASO facilitated 100% of Member State delegation missions with logistic and interpretation support. Eight roundtables with DPS and DU and five (instead of ten) operational meetings on voluntary relocation and other SAR events were organised, as well as capacity building activities for reception centres hosting migrants involved in SARs.⁴⁰ All of these events were appreciated by stakeholders. In December 2021, two other activities were implemented, namely the development of coordination workflow and the implementation of guidance for the harmonisation of SAR events procedures.

Regarding the second outcome indicator (percentage of decrease in average time between SAR disembarkation and lodging of applications) based on EASO data, in 2021 there was an increase of 44% in average time between SAR disembarkation and lodging of applications.⁴¹ It increased from 48 days to 69 days, while the intention was to reach a 50% decrease. Although a 4-weeks' timeframe is foreseen for the completion of the voluntary relocation procedure,⁴² exercises carried out in 2021 required longer processing times, with the COVID-19 measures further affecting the ability to timely proceed with registrations and transfers, thus leading to longer waiting times for applicants to access the IP procedures. Moreover, the substantial increase of sea arrivals in the last quarter of the year, together with technical issues on the relevant IT systems to process data and applications (namely, *Sistema per la Gestione dell'Accoglienza* (SGA) and Vestanet), further impacted the time between disembarkation and lodging.

³⁸ *Centro di Accoglienza per Richiedenti Asilo* in Bari, a reception centre in Bari.

³⁹ EASO internal operational monitoring.

⁴⁰ Highly appreciated by stakeholders was the capacity building activity on voluntary relocation organised in Bari on 6th October.

⁴¹ EASO internal operational monitoring.

⁴² From landing to transfer to a competent Member State.

Based on this preliminary analysis, overall measure 1.B achieved good results, although targets were not fully met. In relation to the priority question on whether EASO has fulfilled its role in the context of voluntary relocation, EASO gave a great contribution, although with some limitations due to the above-mentioned challenges which had an impact on the overall results. All SAR events for which support was requested by the Italian authorities were supported through deployment of human resources at the CARA of Bari as well as at disembarkations. EASO also ensured proper support to and coordination of SAR disembarkation events and voluntary relocation exercises through the training and deployment of EASO ASTs.

3.2.3 Measure 2: Support to the quality and standardisation of the Dublin procedure and asylum determination procedures

Through this measure, EASO enhanced the capacity of the Italian asylum system to improve the quality of outgoing Dublin cases and the efficiency in the management of Dublin cases, with a focus on the capacity of the DCLI DU to handle appeals. The overall aim of processing and monitoring all Dublin cases was achieved, while the number of outgoing take-back and take-charge requests processed was higher than the target. Additionally, notwithstanding a general reduction in the support to the NAC, EASO kept contributing to the enhancement of the NAC capacities, in particular concerning cessation and revocation cases, COI activities, financial and procurement activities and the trafficking in human beings (THB) project. On the other hand, many activities foreseen under the measure in support to both the Italian DU and the NAC were heavily affected by the sudden reduction in personnel, especially from April 2021, due to the already mentioned issues with the temporary contracts. As also indicated by all interviewed stakeholders, the consequences of the gap in the deployment prevented the smooth planning and execution of the activities foreseen for 2021. Thus, the **overall results of this measure were good, when considering the setbacks.**

Support to DCLI Dublin Unit to manage and process Dublin requests and transfers

A total of 2,516 outgoing (take-back and take-charge) requests processed against a target of 1,500.⁴³ Due to a significant backlog, EASO continued to provide support despite the issues with human resources, including by finding alternative solutions such as the temporary deployment of national experts specialised in the area.⁴⁴ According to interviewed stakeholders, the cooperation with the DCLI DU was strong, especially on relocation. The main output foreseen for 2021, namely the coaching on the job-related activities, did not take place due to lack of human resources.

Support to monitor litigation cases and process Dublin transfers

The action in relation to monitoring and processing litigation cases took place at the beginning of the year but was suspended from May onwards due to the termination of interim staff contracts (178 litigation cases monitored and processed against a target of 170). The main output foreseen for 2021 (the development of a monitoring tool for litigation and Dublin transfers) did not take place. Stakeholders at national level highlighted the great support received by EASO in monitoring and processing litigation cases, but also expressed dissatisfaction for the sudden lack of resources which would have been crucial to ensure the continuity and quality of their work in that specific moment until AMIF resources were deployed.

⁴³ This support ensured complementarity with the project funded under the National Programme of the AMIF intervention which supports the management of incoming cases.

⁴⁴ Interviews with EASO staff.

Support to the COI Unit to strengthen the decision-making process

The four country briefing activities foreseen in the OP were organised in 2021 and very welcomed by the COI Unit, as they were tailored to their specific needs.⁴⁵ The basic and advanced training on the medical country of origin information (MedCOI) portal (and access to the portal) were also organised and targeted at TCs officials and two Italian COI Unit focal points, respectively. On the other hand, EASO could not support the development of a feasibility study to assess the establishment of an inter-ministerial COI Unit due to the delays related to the selection of an expert in charge for the development of the feasibility study on the Inter-ministerial COI Unit (and the related implementation of the study visit).⁴⁶

Support to the NAC to manage revocation and cessation cases

EASO supported the NAC in increasing its capacity in cessation and revocation case management, with 373 cases assessed against a target of 144. This action was however affected by challenges in relation to the staff constraints: various stakeholders during interviews highlighted the key contribution given by EASO staff under this action from a quality point of view, however they also flagged the intermittence of this support due to contractual issues. Some stakeholders stressed the need not only to find alternative practical solutions to overcome the human resources issue, but also the importance to timely communicate any issues concerning resources for them to be able to continue the workflow. The support provided to cessation and revocation as well as litigation activities resumed with the deployment of two resources in October.

Regarding the support to the NAC to manage financial and procurement workflows, in view of a phase-out from direct support in finance and procurement activities, EASO supported the implementation and handover of financial and procurement workflows. This action was also highly appreciated by the stakeholders, but it was similarly affected by the issue of the intermittent human resource presence, according to the interviewed national authorities. EASO supported the development of a monitoring and financial reporting template, in synergy with the temporary staff recruited for administrative support purposes in the framework of AMIF emergency action "Em.As. Com" (see section 3.4.2).

Support to Trapani TC in profiling and monitoring the THB phenomenon

EASO finalised the report with yearly data on THB project launched in Trapani in 2020. However, coaching sessions on its usage to the TCs could not be implemented. During interviews, stakeholders expressed their appreciation for the high-quality support received.

3.2.4 Measure 3: Support to the management of judicial backlog

Despite challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic requiring remote work, as well as issues related to interim contract expiration⁴⁷ which left some specialised sections under-supported, **EASO continued providing support to the management of judicial backlog**. In fact, this measure, building on the work already done in 2020, was **one of the most effective** of EASO's operational support to Italy in 2021. Although the objectives were quite ambitious and the backlog of pending cases still significant,⁴⁸ EASO managed to achieve very good results in improving the courts' capacity to manage the backlog.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ They are also reflected in the OP 2022, therefore they should continue.

⁴⁶ Horizontal interview with EASO staff.

⁴⁷ Interview with EASO staff; EASO internal operational monitoring.

⁴⁸ 3,679 cases in 2021, see background.

⁴⁹ Interviews with EASO staff.

Support to case processing in the specialised sections of the tribunals

EASO's support to the specialised sections of the tribunals responsible for immigration, international protection and free movement of citizens,⁵⁰ consisted of either assistance to file preparation, COI, legal and doctrinal research or assistance for the preparation of hearings of IP applicants. Results were mixed when considering the targets set. For instance, 8,937 COI research reports were completed (compared to a target of 8,000); while the number of 3,496 legal analyses were prepared in support of decision writing almost reaching the targeted 3,500; file preparation by research officers deployed to the tribunals was 14,424 rather than the targeted 16,000; jurisprudential research carried out consisted of 1,175 searches rather than the targeted 2,000. EASO also offered cultural mediation and interpretation services during hearings which however was quite cumbersome and time consuming, also considering the increasing number of specialised sections requesting it.⁵¹ In Q4, efforts were made to reassure the stakeholder of EASO's continued support to tribunals in 2022 by way of missions to the specialised sections, meeting directly the authorities concerned.

Support to the Court of Cassation including the General Prosecutor's Office

Support to the Court of Cassation including the General Prosecutor's Office with judicial backlog management was overall successful. EASO supported with 327 jurisprudential searches (compared to a target of 180), and 6,109 files prepared by research officers (against a target of 7,000). These activities enhanced standardisation and uniformity of practices, for instance by focusing on screening and study of cases which presented similar subjects and topics.⁵²

Strengthening coordination and professional development of the specialised sections of the tribunals, the Court of Cassation and the General Prosecutor's Office

This action was also quite successful.⁵³ EASO strived to provide tailor-made training sessions and workshops for judiciary and personnel seconded by EASO to improve their expertise, specialisation and professional development in the areas of international protection. EASO coordinated a training session on gender and sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI), as well as a workshop on identification and referral of THB cases for research officers deployed at Court of Cassation.⁵⁴ Two roundtables were organised in 2021 and focused on good practices and key issues to best support the judicial authorities. This activity partially contributed to address recommendation 4 of the 2020 evaluation, on promoting synergies across all levels of the judicial authorities involved in EASO operations.

The support to the SSM by EASO on the coordination of professional development activities for judges could not, however, take place due to COVID-19 and other national authorities' competing priorities, and is likely to be organised in 2022.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Competences of the Sections are mainly to manage asylum applicants' appeals against a decision issued by the TCs, i.e., rejecting the application, granting subsidiary protection instead of refugee status or granting a type of national protection status instead of an international one.

⁵¹ EASO internal operational monitoring.

⁵² Interviews with EASO staff, previous evaluations.

⁵³ Interviews with EASO staff.

⁵⁴ Interview with EASO staff.

⁵⁵ EASO internal operational monitoring.

3.2.5 Measure 4: Support to the quality management and monitoring of the Italian reception system

Building on the achievements of the OP 2020, measure 4 focused on further enhancing the quality and sustainability of the reception management and monitoring system for adults and UAMs, both at 1st and 2nd line. Whilst in 2020 special attention was given to develop monitoring and management tools to be used at central level (also to better respond to the COVID-19 related challenges), in 2021 EASO increased its support at local level through the deployment of human resources at Prefectures.

Key challenges to this measure were the increase of sea arrivals and disembarkation events, coupled with the health emergency and related containment procedures. Moreover, challenges in relation to the human resources allocated to the Afghan evacuees' monitoring activities⁵⁶ were also reported by EASO resources deployed in DCLI.⁵⁷ These trends increased the pressure and workload for the management and monitoring of the reception system and impeded the full implementation of some activities. For instance, monitoring of reception conditions of the first line reception system was not prioritised by DCLI, when compared to other monitoring activities such as landings or quarantine containment measures. Therefore, due to urgencies in relation to the management and monitoring of transfers and allocation of applicants in reception facilities, Prefectures could not implement monitoring visits in reception centres in their respective areas. Issues related to the (lack of or delay in) renewal of contracts of EASO staff were also reported by national stakeholders, although measure 4 was the least affected by this, including due to the strengthened support at local level to the Prefectures, which increased the number of human resources and EASO's capacity.⁵⁸

In line with recommendation 3 of the 2020 evaluation,⁵⁹ and upon the request from DCLI, in 2021 EASO increased the number of Reception and Information System Officers (RISO) deployed in Prefectures at local level (from 5 initially planned to 15, therefore 10 additional resources). This change was driven by the need to strengthen the capacity of the Prefectures to monitor the Italian reception system from the qualitative and quantitative points of view and enhance the communication and information flow between Prefectures and DCLI at central level.

Despite the challenges reported, EASO managed to **largely achieve the intended results and to implement almost all the planned activities**. In 2021, EASO reinforced the support previously provided in a number of areas, ranging from legal, policy and financial monitoring, to procedural, quantitative and statistics, qualitative and standards fields. For both first- and second-line reception systems, all the intended targets were achieved and, in some cases, even exceeded, with very few exceptions.

First line reception system

In terms of **legal, policy and financial monitoring**, more than double the planned number of policy documents were analysed (79 instead of 30) and significantly more legal opinions were drafted (373 instead of 150). A tool to collect and categorise legal opinions on tenders by theme was developed as well as guidelines on accounting requirements.

In the **procedural, quantitative and statistics** area, EASO's intervention was also very effective: a range of tools and workflows were introduced, including a workflow for the management of data

⁵⁶ EASO's support to Afghan citizens evacuations included the constant update of the database, tracking the allocations, following up individual cases if necessary and reporting updates to DCLI.

⁵⁷ EASO internal operational monitoring.

⁵⁸ EASO internal operational monitoring.

⁵⁹ Support the setting-up and roll-out of a reception quality monitoring system at central and local level.

of applicants from disembarkation from quarantine vessels or transfers from quarantine land facilities to their allocation into reception facilities and a tool for data collection on transfers and allocation of applicants. Furthermore, 15 Prefectures (instead of 10) were supported on the management of data flow through RISOs deployed within the Prefectures or through ad hoc missions.

EASO also supported the **qualitative monitoring** of the first line reception system, although activities were delayed compared to the original planning. EASO provided support by:

- a) developing a questionnaire based on EASO standards and indicators on reception conditions, later adapted to the Italian standards from existing legal framework (*Capitolato 2021*). The structure of the questionnaire, that will be integrated into the national monitoring platform (*Gestione Centrale Controllo Accoglienza – GCCA*) which is being developed by DCLI, reflected the structure of EASO ARC tool;
- b) supporting the piloting of the questionnaire in five of the 11 pilot Prefectures selected. Prefectures are notably responsible for the management of reception facilities, therefore EASO resources (RISO) supported the Prefectures for the preparation, implementation and follow up of monitoring visits with the developed questionnaire, as well as the DCLI monitoring office to collect feedback from Prefectures throughout the piloting phase. The piloting of the questionnaire was done through an online platform, temporarily set up by DCLI IT office, while waiting for the finalisation of the GCCA platform by March 2022.

Second line reception system

In terms of **financial monitoring**, most targets were achieved, with only one exception: 10 technical reports were prepared for the set-up of the functionalities of the IT platform as well as guidelines for the use of IT platform, while slightly less project closure reports were drafted (26 instead of 35) due to the high number of closed projects with an ongoing dispute.⁶⁰

In the area of support to **legal and qualitative monitoring** of reception conditions in SAI projects, 100 legal analyses and notes were drafted (instead of 20) and the tool for data consolidation and analysis of results of monitoring visits by the *Servizio Centrale* was updated. This tool, completed in Q2, contributed to address recommendation 3 of the 2020 evaluation, thus enhancing the monitoring framework related to the second-line reception system, to support DCLI to take follow up and corrective measures on second line project funding and programming.

Office II: second line reception and UAMs

This sub-measure aimed at enhancing capacity of Office II at DCLI to implement effective procedures for the reception of UAMs. The allocation of UAMs to reception continued to be reported as extremely challenging throughout the year, due to the increase of UAMs in quarantine facilities and in first reception centres for adults. The support provided by EASO was appreciated by national stakeholders in terms of the significant qualitative contribution given to their work; however, difficulties were reported in relation to the lack of renewal of contracts of staff which had an impact on the overall achievement of results.⁶¹ EASO provided support in drafting policy and legal documents and opinions in relation to UAMs reception (35 instead of 30 documents), and the organisation of two regional coordination workshops for UAMs reception authorities. Only one target, the development of tools to aggregate data, was not achieved mostly due to lack or absence of human resources. Based on the above preliminary analysis, and looking at the level of implementation, the objectives were largely achieved and almost all the activities were conducted.

⁶⁰ EASO internal operational monitoring.

⁶¹ Interviews with national stakeholders and EASO staff.

To measure progress towards the achievement of the overall objectives, EASO made use of two **outcome level indicators**: evidence of a sustainable reception management system in place according to a set of established indicators⁶² and evidence of a sustainable monitoring system functioning according to a set of established indicators.⁶³

In terms of achievement of the first outcome indicator, there is some evidence⁶⁴ that a reduction of 20% of time between the closure of the project and the conclusion of the financial controls compared to the baseline of 1,282 days was achieved; a reduction of 87% (instead of 50%) in the discrepancy between the registration and the national planning of SGA events was reached. On the other hand, only 40% (instead of 60%) tender procedures were adjusted and/or concluded within the national legal framework on reception conditions due to the fact that many procedures were launched in the last quarter of 2021 and were still pending at the time of writing this report (February 2022).

As for the second outcome indicator, this cannot be measured, given that the IT platform GCCA to track and consolidate real time data on monitoring visits results done by Prefectures was not finalised in 2021. Nonetheless, significant progress was made on the content of the questionnaire to be used during monitoring visits, also thanks to the appointment of the DCLI focal point for this activity, allowing its adaptation to the new *Capitolato* (issued in February 2021), its testing and enhancing an effective negotiation with the stakeholder to prepare the actual use of the GCCA once finalised by DCLI IT Office.

3.2.6 Measure 5: Support to the coordination amongst Italian asylum authorities, including through the development of information systems

The intended results of measure 5, namely to improve the capacity of the Italian authorities to efficiently reduce information and practice gaps among concerned authorities (measure 5.1), as well as to manage and monitor the asylum and reception systems through enhanced and integrated information systems (measure 5.2), were not achieved, due to the reduced number of resources or for reasons not attributable to EASO.

On the one hand, **progress was made on certain aspects**, including the drafting of a report on good practices implemented by local actors following regional coordination meetings (measure 5.1); the facilitation of 8 coordination meetings (instead of 10) amongst offices involved in the management of IT systems and the support in the drafting of a User Acceptance Test Document of the scheduling tool (measure 5.2).

On the other hand, regarding measure 5.1, the limited achievements were due to lack of human resources supporting the sub-measure.⁶⁵ As a consequence, the overall coordination mechanism was disrupted and no achievements or advances were possible throughout the year. With regard to measure 5.2, **the SUA system could not be finalised during 2021, which was a prerequisite for most of the remaining activities**. This was mainly due to technical problems on the authorities' side, since the development of SUA is implemented by an external service provider. The latter was changed in July by DCLI, and the new service provider had to suspend the testing of SUA due to persisting fails in the system, causing a significant delay in the overall completion of the

⁶² Based on the percentage of reduction of time between the closure of the project and the conclusion of the financial controls, the percentage of tender procedures adjusted and/or concluded within the national legal framework on reception conditions.

⁶³ Based on the percentage of Prefectures transfer data collected during Inspective visits to Central level according to an established workflow/mechanism, the percentage of Prefectures that increased their monitoring capacity on reception conditions in line with EU standards indicators – use of an established workflow and tools (GCCA) following participation to briefings.

⁶⁴ EASO internal operational monitoring.

⁶⁵ EASO internal operational monitoring, 2021.

system. According to interviewed stakeholders, the implementation of such a system takes time and should be considered more as a medium to long-term goal rather than one that can be achieved in the framework of a one-year OP (or in two years, considering that it was also included in the OP 2020). In coordination with the national stakeholders and given the delays out of EASO's reach, EASO decided to stop the support to the development of SUA which is therefore not included in the OP 2022-2024.

Thus, the effectiveness of this measure is limited, though for reasons not attributable to EASO but rather to the structure and management of the core activity and technical issues regarding the completion of SUA.

3.3 Efficiency

In terms of **budgetary expenses**, overall a total of € 10,660,551.20⁶⁶ was earmarked to be spent in 2021. The budget was revised twice, the first time in May when it was reduced to € 9,860,500, and the second time in Autumn. By the end of December, the actual total was estimated at 98% of the allocated budget.⁶⁷

According to interviewed stakeholders, overall financial resources were **efficiently spent** to deliver the outputs and outcomes set out in the OP. The financial resources were also appropriately re-shuffled depending on the activities to be carried out across the different measures and in line with resources needs and/or gaps.⁶⁸

As noted during interviews with EASO staff, the increase of arrivals and the fact that Italy continued to remain the only country providing a port of safety for SAR events throughout the COVID-19 pandemic inevitably caused an increase in the workload. As such, the activities were adapted to respond to emerging needs, along with a change in the budget during the mid-year and autumn reviews.⁶⁹ As a consequence, deviations in the budget monitoring were detected before revision (e.g., due to the increased mission costs related to long-term support by EASO resources from Cyprus operations).

In terms of **human resources**, there was a general shortage of resources throughout the year, which affected all measures and in particular measures 1.A, 1.B and 2. The main challenge was related to constraints imposed by the restrictive deployment framework resulting in reduction of the planned deployments and impacting the implementation and efficiency of the OP. As a mitigation measure to address potential inefficiencies, before the Complementary Deployment Mechanism (CDM) was put in place, individual experts and contract agents were employed, although stakeholders reported that these interim solutions did not allow for continuity and efficiency in the organisation of the work. Measure 4 was comparably the least affected by the CDM in 2021, due to the start, at the end of 2020, of a new kind of support at local level to the Prefectures, which meant that several new resources were recruited, increasing EASO's capacity. Overall, as also noted during interviews with EASO staff, **the deployment of human resources was adapted to respond to emerging needs.**

There were also **considerable delays** in the implementation of the activities envisaged for some measures, not only because of technical issues (e.g., measure 5) or problems with resources (especially 1.A, 1.B.2 and 2), but also in part due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the related health measures and change of priorities of the stakeholders (for instance measure 1.A). These factors had an impact on the efficiency of the measures because the intended results could not be achieved

⁶⁶ Agency internal financial monitoring (non-validated).

⁶⁷ Interview with EASO staff.

⁶⁸ Interview with EASO staff.

⁶⁹ Interview with EASO staff and validation meeting with EASO held on 15th February 2022.

within the allotted timeframe. One lesson learned, identified during one interview with EASO staff, is to be more realistic in terms of implementation and more specifically to strive for an earlier implementation of the activities.

Despite the constraints, **the intervention produced several benefits** and the quality of outputs was overall not affected, as also confirmed by all stakeholders interviewed. The benefits brought by the intervention were indeed highly valued by all stakeholders at EU, national and international level. For example, although no official data is available to enable an analysis or comparison of cost-efficiency before and after EASO's intervention, measure 3 was probably one of the most efficient, considering the degree of achievement of targets. EASO provided technical assistance which increased efficiency (and sustainability) in the management of the reduction of the backlog and processing of claims.

3.4 Coherence

3.4.1 Internal coherence

Overall, the **different measures of the OP 2021 were coherent and operated well together**.

The objectives of each measure were **aligned with the priorities** identified in the needs assessment. The measures **largely aligned with and complemented one another**, which was facilitated by the organisation of the measures around the main thematic areas of the CEAS and the different phases of the asylum process, which avoided overlaps and duplications of activities across the intervention. Most of the interviewed stakeholders also confirmed that this was the case.⁷⁰

For example, measures 1.B and 4 were complementary to each other and mutually reinforcing, not only in terms of chronological actions, but especially in terms of coordination, timely information sharing and communication during SAR events, as also confirmed during interviews.⁷¹ This interlinkage between the two measures is particularly relevant as in 2021 EASO notably increased (under measure 4) its support to DCLI at local level through the deployment of resources (RISOs) at Prefectures, in line with the increase of disembarkation events. Therefore, the complementarity with measure 1.B is clear, as the latter focuses on supporting the internal coordination mechanism of SAR disembarkation events procedures amongst the Italian authorities (DCLI, DPS, DU), including by facilitating the support to these emergency events, as well as roundtables and operational meetings. As also mentioned under the effectiveness criterion, achievements were overall good for both measures 1.B and 4 despite the encountered challenges, which suggests that the coordination efforts between these measures (and with stakeholders) also worked well in practice. On the other hand, some **minor overlaps** were noted by one stakeholder⁷² when looking at the specific outputs and actions of some measures in the results framework, which in turn makes it difficult to assess the achievements. It was noted that these overlaps, coupled with the complexity and high number of indicators, also contribute to make it challenging to measure both progress and degree of coherence.

⁷⁰ Interviews with EASO staff.

⁷¹ Interviews with EASO staff.

3.4.2 External coherence

Coherence with AMIF

Overall, the OP 2021 was **coherent with the National Programme of the AMIF** intervention. For example, under measure 2, EASO's support notably aimed at enhancing the capacity of the Italian asylum system by improving the quality of Dublin outgoing cases and the efficiency in the management of Dublin cases. This support was complementary to the national project funded under AMIF intervention which supports the management of incoming cases. In relation to the outgoing sector, for what concerns case management and operational activities, potential challenges have been temporarily resolved with the recruitment of 11 AMIF-funded resources supporting the ministerial personnel working on outgoing cases. However, **some potential future gaps were identified**, as following the end of AMIF staff's contracts in November 2022 and upon request from the authority, the DU may need support again in terms of human resources and operational capacity.

One of the specific activities carried out in 2021 under measure 2, in relation to the support to NAC to manage financial and procurement workflows, consisted in capacity building activities to improve the internal financial systems of NAC through the development of a monitoring and financial reporting template. This activity was carried out in synergy with the temporary staff recruited for administrative support purposes in the framework of AMIF emergency action "Em.As. Com" (HOME/2018/AMIF/AG/EMAS/0090).

Moreover, although not implemented, the AMIF-funded integrated SUA system (in relation to measure 5) would have certainly improved coherence because all aspects of the asylum procedures (reception, international protection, Dublin procedures, voluntary relocation and management of funds for UAMs) would have been processed through one single and coherent system and shared amongst all key players, promoting homogeneous analyses and time saving.

In the area of reception, some complementarities can also be identified between AMIF and EASO's intervention in Italy. Two projects are being implemented through AMIF: *ALFa – Accogliere Le Fragilità* project,⁷³ with € 5.3 million awarded to the Prefecture of Turin, and ICARE – Integration and Community Care for Asylum and Refugees in an Emergency,⁷⁴ a € 9 million project launched by the Emilia Romagna Region. While these two projects focus on integration, in the past two years, EASO's support to the DCLI focused on strengthening the qualitative and quantitative management of the reception system and monitoring of reception conditions, both at 1st and 2nd line.

Therefore, **AMIF and EASO work coherently on different levels.**

Following up on recommendation 5 of the OP 2020 evaluation, the **cooperation with the AMIF Managing Authority** (MoI DCLI) was improved in 2021. A workflow was established at EASO central level, mostly as a result of the transition of EASO into the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), whereby the AMIF National Programmes are to be shared with EASO for comments before their approval. During interviews with EASO staff, however, it was noted that the draft National Programmes are still to be received for comments and that this process could be in practice more effective.

Coherence with actions of other stakeholders

The OP 2021 was also coherent with the objectives and activities of other relevant stakeholders at national level. In relation to the coordination between stakeholders involved in SAR disembarkation

⁷³ Project website: <https://www.piemonteimmigrazione.it/progetti/item/1465-alfa-accogliere-le-fragilita>

⁷⁴ Project website: <http://www.progettoicare.it/home>

and voluntary relocation events, as also confirmed by stakeholders during interviews,⁷⁵ EASO⁷⁶ established and maintained an effective coordination and communication flow with national authorities, based on a continuous exchange of information and on regular updates among staff at both central (DCLI, DU) and local level (Prefectures, IOs). Information on SAR events and assignation of the port of safety were shared internally in a timely manner (e.g., with the team in charge of measure 4). On the other hand, some stakeholders at international level also stressed the need for a timelier sharing of information on transfers during voluntary relocation with the other actors involved in the process.⁷⁷

In terms of more general cooperation between EASO and other stakeholders at EU level, feedback received during interviews was overall positive, including in terms of complementarity of work. On the other hand, one stakeholder at EU level reported minor difficulties in relation to communication with EASO and more specifically indicated that information could be shared a bit more systematically.

3.5 EU added value

Overall, the evidence collected from stakeholder consultation, desk research and the findings from the other evaluation criteria suggests that **there was an added value resulting from the 2021 intervention compared to what could have been achieved in its absence.**

First, the OP 2021 ensured continuity with and built on the results achieved in 2020, therefore continuing to address the consequences of the disproportionate pressure on the Italian asylum and reception system, which could have not been faced by the Italian authorities alone.

Moreover, EASO's intervention positively contributed to strengthening the national asylum and reception system, albeit with varying levels of achievement across different measures, enacting amongst almost all levels of the asylum procedure, from disembarkation up to the judiciary, based on a relationship of trust built with authorities.

EASO is highly regarded by all stakeholders interviewed. Its operational support to Italy in 2021 was highly valued by national authorities as they rely on it, especially to design high quality methodologies and tools, monitor procedures and establish standards. The EU added value was also recognised when it comes to coordination, as the intervention encouraged coordination, exchange of information and good practices among national authorities and thus created synergies and efficiencies which could have not been achieved to the same degree without the intervention.

For example, in relation to measures 1.A and 1.B, without the support of EASO, the quality and standardisation of access to asylum procedures would have been negatively affected by the pressure due to increase of applications and COVID-19 precautionary measures. Another added value was recognised by stakeholders in the improvement of knowledge about the CEAS as well as in the support for SAR disembarkations and voluntary relocation operations, including by maintaining an effective communication flow, based on a continuous exchange of information between central and local level.

Through measure 2, EASO's added value lied in the increased productivity and quality of the DU to process requests and transfers as well as in the support given to NAC in revocation and cessation cases management. When the support ceased or slowed down during the year because of the issues with human resources, this negatively affected the continuity of activities, thus suggesting that the work would be less effectively carried out by the stakeholders alone.

⁷⁵ Interviews with EASO staff and national stakeholders.

⁷⁶ Especially EASO team responsible for measure 1.B and supporting disembarkation events.

⁷⁷ Interviews with EU level stakeholders and international organisations.

Regarding measure 3, the technical support of EASO was decisive to speed up the processing of international protection cases and to improve the quality of decision-making. The backlog could not have been reduced to the same degree and at the same rate without EASO's support in its management.

The main added value of measure 4 lies especially in the quality management methodology at the local level and the support given to the Prefectures, in line with the increase of disembarkation events, especially in some locations.

3.6 Sustainability

It is difficult to assess if all outcomes are sustainable. Nevertheless, desk research and stakeholder consultations indicated the following sustainable outcomes:

- The development of methodologies, guidelines, quality assurance tools and standards which are highly valued by all national stakeholders and should remain in their structures in the future.
- The development of cooperation instruments and workflows to facilitate collaboration with and between national stakeholders, especially in the context of SAR disembarkation events and voluntary relocation exercises, which allow to prepare for future challenges and changes.
- The development of monitoring tools which are crucial to assess whether the actions are yielding the desired results.
- The quality of the work carried out by EASO resources which allows to analyse and produce the information with the level of quality that is required to ensure its lasting impact.
- The contribution to the sharing of good practice. For example, synergies across levels of the judicial authorities involved in EASO operations have been promoted through the organisation of meetings and thematic roundtables to share good practices and issues faced at local level.⁷⁸
- The capacity of partners has been increased through the organisation or facilitation of training sessions, thematic sessions, coaching activities, and roundtables. For example, up to December 2021, numerous capacity building activities were organised to support quality of EASO's intervention in Italy, mostly under measures 1 and 3 of the OP 2021.⁷⁹ Training on MedCOI portal for TCs' focal points were successfully implemented in Italy in 2021 as part of the operations under measure 2, two workshops on UAMs were implemented under measure 4, while roundtables on good practices were organised for judges.
- A long-term strategy for a gradual phase-out is being discussed with MoI DPS⁸⁰ in the context of the negotiations for the next OP 2022-2024.

It should be noted that **all these benefits are sustainable only to a certain extent**. They are still dependent on future resources to enable the respective organisations to respond to newly emerging trends and challenges in the field. As highlighted by national stakeholders during interviews, there is a general need for a more stable and continuative support from EASO's side. For example, the presence of more stable resources in the context of voluntary relocation, beside the deployment of Member States experts, is crucial to guarantee the continuity and sustainability of the activity. On the other hand, it seems that national authorities often rely strongly on EASO's support, which risks limiting the sustainability of the intervention.

⁷⁸ Linked to recommendation 4 of the OP 2020 evaluation.

⁷⁹ Linked to recommendation 6 of the OP 2020 evaluation.

⁸⁰ Linked to recommendation 1 of the OP 2020 evaluation.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 General conclusions

EASO's operational support to Italy in 2021 contributed, with varying levels of success, to strengthening the national capacity to manage the asylum and reception system.

The intervention was highly **relevant** to the needs of stakeholders and challenges at national level during the evaluation period. The OP was designed following a needs assessment and thus seamlessly addressed these needs at the time of its adoption, while continuing to address most problems and challenges arising throughout the year. On the other hand, although not included in the OP 2021, the evaluation found that more could be done to support the need for timely identification of vulnerable applicants, which is especially evident in the access to the asylum procedure phase, as well as to improve information provision.

Overall, EASO's support to Italy was **effective**, although with varying levels of success across different measures. With some exceptions and notwithstanding all efforts made by EASO, across the measures several targets were not met, due to suspended or cancelled activities and an increased workload and pressure on the Italian asylum and reception system, besides the challenges related to COVID-19. More specifically:

- **Measure 1.A:** Although severely affected by the issues in relation to human resources, measure 1.A was crucial in further enhancing the quality and standardisation of access to asylum procedures and effective in supporting the DPS, including by providing coaching and training sessions.
- **Measure 1.B:** EASO made a considerable contribution to the registration activities. **In the context of voluntary relocation, EASO fulfilled its function** although with some limitations due to challenges in relation to human resources, the limited number of pledges offered by Member States, and COVID-19 restrictive measures. EASO effectively supported the **coordination of SAR disembarkation events and voluntary relocation exercises**, including by maintaining an effective communication flow, based on a continuous exchange of information between central and local level. All SAR events for which support was requested by the Italian authorities were successfully supported through deployment of human resources at the CARA of Bari as well as at disembarkations.
- **Measure 2:** EASO kept contributing to the enhancement of the NAC capacities, in particular concerning cessation and revocation cases, COI activities, financial and procurement activities as well as the DU in managing and processing Dublin outgoing requests and transfers.
- **Measure 3:** Although the objectives were quite ambitious and the backlog of pending cases still significant, EASO managed to achieve very good results in improving the courts' capacity to manage the backlog.
- **Measure 4:** EASO's support improved the capacity of authorities to manage reception procedures and provided them with the methodological and organisational tools for planning and monitoring.
- **Measure 5:** This measure was the least effective due to the issues in the deployment of resources and in part to factors beyond EASO's control.

In terms of the **efficiency** of the intervention, financial resources were efficiently spent to deliver the outputs and outcomes set out in the OP and EASO adapted its activities and budget to respond to emerging needs. In terms of human resources, there was a general lack of resources throughout the year, which affected all measures. The main challenge related to constraints imposed by the restrictive deployment framework resulting in a reduction of the planned deployments and impacting the implementation and efficiency of the intervention.

Regarding the **internal coherence** of the intervention, the measures of the OP 2021 were coherent, interlinked and complementary; this is particularly true in relation to measures 1.B and 4. As for the **external coherence**, the OP 2021 was coherent with the AMIF intervention. The cooperation with the AMIF Managing Authority will improve in the coming years, including through the establishment of a workflow at EASO central level (mostly as a result of the transition into EUAA), whereby the AMIF National Programmes are to be shared with EASO before their approval to avoid overlaps and improve synergies.

The evaluation found that there was an **added value** resulting from the 2021 intervention compared to what could have been achieved in its absence. EASO is highly regarded by all stakeholders consulted and its operational support to Italy in 2021 was highly valued by national authorities as they rely on it, especially to design high quality methodologies and tools, monitor procedures and establish standards. The impact on coordination was also recognised as an EU added value, as the intervention encouraged coordination, exchange of information and good practices among national authorities.

It is difficult to assess if all outcomes are **sustainable**. Nonetheless, examples of sustainable outcomes include the development of methodologies, guidelines, quality assurance tools, workflows and standards which should remain in the stakeholders' structures in the future; the development of cooperation instruments monitoring mechanisms; the organisation or facilitation of training sessions, thematic sessions, coaching activities and roundtables which increase the capacity of partners.

The table below presents a scoring for each criterion and each measure, based on the results presented in this report.

Table 2. Scoring of achievements of the EASO-Italy OP 2021

	Measure IT1.A	Measure IT1.B	Measure IT2	Measure IT3	Measure IT4	Measure IT5
Relevance	Very good	Good	Very good	Very good	Very Good	Fair
Effectiveness	Good	Good	Good	Very good	Very Good	Unsatisfactory
Efficiency	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Not rateable
Coherence	Good	Very Good	Good	Good	Very Good	Fair
EU added value	Very good	Very good	Very Good	Very good	Very good	Fair
Sustainability	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Not rateable

4.2 Key lessons learned and good practices

Some **lessons learned** were shared by stakeholders during interviews:

- Some **targets** could not be fully achieved in part because they were **too ambitious**. For example, in relation to measure 3, it was noted that, while in terms of quality the objectives were achieved, the (quantitative) contribution to the reduction of the judicial backlog was a very ambitious target. Although overall very good results were achieved, with a good reduction of pending cases, it was also noted that outputs varied depending on the court location and overall were overly ambitious. The lack or reduction of human resources certainly contributed

to create further challenges as well as the **short timeframe of the OP**, although with the new multi-annual OP this is no longer relevant for the future.

- Results depend not only on EASO's support but also on **partners' absorption capacity and flexibility or other external circumstances**. For example, in relation to the access to asylum procedures, it was noted that local authorities (IOs) are often under pressure with limited availability of staff and that EASO could help enhance their sense of ownership, for example through the organisation of coordination meetings. Another example is measure 5.2, where results were not achieved for reasons not attributable to EASO, but rather to the technical issues with the implementation of SUA.
- Challenges in relation to the **shortage of resources** were highlighted by all stakeholders interviewed, thus suggesting a strong need to ensure **more stable and continuous support** from EASO's side across all measures, especially those which were severely affected by this issue. The presence of stable human resources was considered crucial not only to ensure continuity and efficiency, but also the quality of the work. For example, with regard to the priority question, the presence of more stable resources in the context of voluntary relocation was considered key to guarantee the continuity of the activity and a sustainable planning of registrations.
- In order to **avoid overlaps and duplications** of work, some stakeholders suggested as a "lesson learned" that EASO could look to identify good practices and materials among existing initiatives and share these, for example in the area of monitoring of reception centres or vulnerability. Starting from what has already been done in some areas, would avoid the risk of duplicating work.

Moreover, based on desk research and stakeholder consultations, the following **good practices** were identified:

- In 2021, EASO demonstrated **flexibility and adaptability** in the face of adverse situations caused by the pandemic. This includes the development and implementation of remote approaches which saved time and improved resource efficiency. One example is the Helpdesk on procedures and Dublin standards foreseen under measure 1.A, which remotely supported IOs in technical and procedural aspects related to the implementation of the registration procedures and Dublin transfers.
- Although targets were ambitious, and despite the issues in relation to the lack of human resources, EASO managed to effectively contribute to the management of the **backlog at second instance** in 2021, by supporting the Tribunals and the Court of Cassation and its General Prosecutor's Office with legal processing, an experience that could be replicated in other countries experiencing similar issues.
- In order to foster capacity building and knowledge and skills transfer in a sustainable manner, EASO organised 55 **training activities** in 2021. Training is indeed one of the most effective tools to achieve long-term results and improve capacity building.
- Another good practice identified in relation to the interlinkage between measures 1.B and 4 is the complementarity of these two measures, which was ensured in particular by means of **effective coordination, timely information sharing and communication during SAR events**. This ensured that the two measures could be mutually reinforcing and work well together in practice.

4.3 Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Support the timely identification of vulnerable applicants and strengthen their referral and intake in reception centres

There is a need to support the timely identification of vulnerable applicants, including minors, in the access to the asylum procedure phase, as well as to strengthen the referral and intake mechanisms of vulnerable applicants in reception centres. In 2021, vulnerabilities were identified only through informal mechanisms, which rely on the capacity of local actors to respond to needs in a timely manner. As a result, vulnerable applicants are often not identified or only identified after having been in the asylum procedure for a long time. The timely identification of vulnerable applicants and the referral mechanism could be improved by:

- Implementing capacity building activities for relevant national authorities (first contact officials, reception authorities) as well as NGOs providing information at border/transit zones or reception centres.
- Organising coordination meetings to improve coordination between national authorities from local to national level to foster harmonisation of practices at local level.
- Deploying human resources in support to pre-identification/screening of vulnerability indicators at IOs and disembarkations.
- Identifying existing good practices, looking at the work already done in the area of vulnerability in Italy (for example by IOM and UNHCR).

This recommendation is in line with the 2022 needs assessment which identified this as one of the priority areas.

Recommendation 2: Improve support to information provision, especially in emergency situations

While EASO has been active in information provision related to the asylum procedures through the ASTs at the lodging phase, there is an overall need to enhance the delivery of information provision, also covering initial phases of the IP procedures. In particular, EASO could further provide operational support and improve the delivery of information provision, including but not limited to the area of voluntary relocation, by:

- Implementing capacity building activities for relevant authorities/NGOs to increase their know-how about the delivery and content of information provision.
- Producing additional informative material and/or adjusting current ones.
- Identifying existing good practices, looking at the work already done in the area of info provision in Italy (for example by IOM and UNHCR).

This recommendation is in line with the 2022 needs assessment which identified this as one of the priority areas.

Recommendation 3: Increase support to SAR disembarkation events and voluntary relocations, provided that such a need arises

There is a possibility of a future sudden rise in the number of arrivals. If that is the case, the good achievements of the OP 2021 in the support to SAR disembarkation events and voluntary relocation exercises should be continued and further increased. This could be done by:

- Increasing the number of stable dedicated resources (e.g., at IOs) for registrations and other functional activities related to SAR disembarkation and voluntary relocation activities and making sure this support is ensured with continuity.
- Organising coordination activities involving relevant stakeholders (for instance, DPS, IOs).

- Support information provision specifically on voluntary relocation at disembarkation (as also indicated in recommendation 2).

Recommendation 4: Strengthen the DCLI Dublin Unit monitoring capacity of litigation cases

The DU may need support again in terms of human resources and operational capacity. Therefore, it is recommended that EASO:

- Prioritise the development of a tool (which was foreseen in measure 2 but not developed), that can support the efficient management of cases. Such a tool could be used for tracking deadlines and monitoring progress in litigation phase.
- Deploy additional dedicated trained human resources in support to the management of the incoming Dublin caseload (currently managed by AMIF).
- Organise coaching on the job activities for new Dublin officials.

Recommendation 5: Simplify the results indicators database

Given the complexity of the monitoring intervention logic adopted by EASO and the large number of indicators established, it is recommended that EASO simplify the results framework in order to enhance measurability of actions. This could be done by:

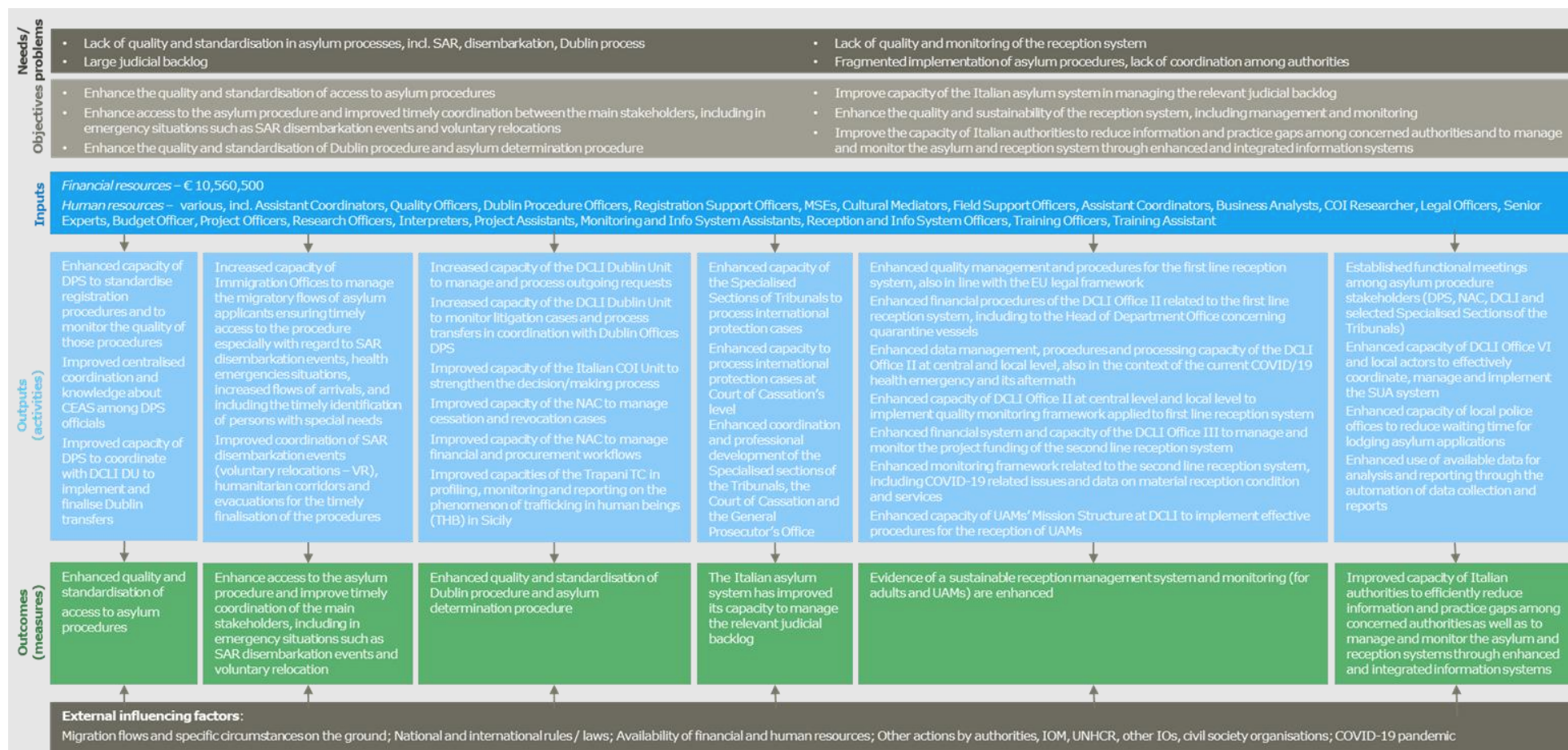
- Reducing the number of indicators, e.g., by avoiding overlaps and duplications of indicators between measures.
- Establishing a clear linkage between output and outcome indicators which would allow for a better understanding of the effectiveness of the intervention.
- Considering the prioritisation of actions according to current needs, while ensuring at the same time a forward-looking perspective; for example, the more critical priorities (e.g., in relation to voluntary relocation) could be made clearer in operational terms as well as be based on trends analysis to ensure a forward-looking perspective.

Recommendation 6: Considering a phase-out plan regarding the support to the judiciary

Given the additional human resources which will be deployed under the Recovery Fund and considering the good results achieved under measure 3, EASO should consider a medium-term phase-out plan regarding the support to the judiciary. Such a plan could:

- Identify the specific activities to be implemented in the medium term, for example provision of training on various topics to the new personnel of *Ufficio del Processo* (e.g., such as inclusion or COI) and envisioning a longer-term timeframe from the outset.

Annex 1 Intervention logic



Annex 2 Evaluation matrix

Operationalised questions	Indicators / descriptors	Norms / judgement criteria	Indicative sources of evidence
Relevance: To what extent was the intervention in Italy relevant to its stakeholders, considering their original needs and any changes therein?			
<p>Were the objectives of the OP 2021 relevant to the needs of stakeholders in Italy, including in light of any changes encountered during 2021?</p> <p><u>Prompts:</u></p> <p><i>What needs and problems were identified prior to the launch of the intervention?</i></p> <p><i>How have the needs and problems faced by stakeholders evolved over time?</i></p> <p><i>Are there any gaps in terms of needs or problems not addressed by the intervention?</i></p> <p><i>What were the objectives of the intervention when first established? Were these appropriate to meet the needs of stakeholders?</i></p> <p><i>Were the objectives/targets/outputs adjusted during the implementation of the intervention? Were these changes appropriate to meet the needs of stakeholders?</i></p>	<p>Intervention logic</p> <p>Needs identified in needs assessment of the intervention</p> <p>Evidence of problems / needs and their evolution over time (e.g., trends in arrivals, trends in asylum applications)</p> <p>Stakeholder views on their needs and the degree to which the intervention addressed their needs and problems</p> <p>Adjustments made to original objectives/targets/outputs (if applicable)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of ways in which the objectives were appropriate to meet the needs</p> <p>Evidence / examples of gaps not addressed by the objectives</p>	<p>The intervention was relevant throughout 2021 to meet the needs of stakeholders</p> <p>Where new needs / problems arose, appropriate steps were taken to adjust to these</p>	<p>OP 2021</p> <p>Results framework</p> <p>Needs assessment</p> <p>Eurostat data on migration and asylum</p> <p>National statistics on migration and asylum</p> <p>Interviews with EASO personnel</p> <p>Interviews with authorities</p> <p>Interviews with external stakeholders</p> <p>Results from the evaluation of effectiveness</p>
Effectiveness: What have been the (quantitative and qualitative) effects of the intervention in Italy and to what extent can these be credited to the intervention rather than external factors?			
<p>To what extent were the intended results of the OP 2021 achieved? What factors helped or hindered</p>	<p>Intervention logic and its causal links</p>	<p>Activities were implemented as</p>	<p>OP 2021</p> <p>Previous OPs (for context)</p>

Operationalised questions	Indicators / descriptors	Norms / judgement criteria	Indicative sources of evidence
<p>the achievements and how did EASO cope with any challenges?</p> <p><u>Prompts:</u></p> <p><i>Measure IT1.A Was the quality and standardisation of access to asylum procedures enhanced? Why or why not?</i></p> <p><i>To what extent was the quality self-assessment methodology tested in Questure? What factors helped or hindered this?</i></p> <p><i>Measure IT 1.B: To what extent was access to the asylum procedure enhanced?</i></p> <p><i>Measure IT 3: Have the competent Italian courts improved their capacity to manage the judicial backlog? Why or why not?</i></p> <p><i>To what extent has this resulted in a reduction of the judicial backlog? Why or why not?</i></p> <p><i>Measure IT 4: Is there evidence of a sustainable reception management system and monitoring (for adults and UAMs) having been enhanced? Why or why not?</i></p> <p><i>Measure IT 5: To what extent has the capacity of Italian authorities to efficiently reduce information and coordination practice gaps among concerned authorities improved?</i></p> <p><i>Measure IT 5: To what extent has the capacity of the Italian authorities to manage and monitor the asylum and reception systems through enhanced and integrated information systems improved? (Linked to recommendation 3 of the OP 2020 evaluation)</i></p>	<p>Degree of achievement of targets (output and outcome level) set out in the results framework (all measures)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of changes in quality and standardisation of access to asylum procedures (IT 1.A)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of changes in access to the asylum procedure (IT 1.B)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of changes in quality and standardisation of the Dublin procedure (IT 2)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of changes in quality and standardisation of the asylum determination procedure (IT 2)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of changes in capacity of Italian courts to manage backlog (IT 3)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of changes in the judicial backlog (IT 3)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of there being a change in sustainability and monitoring of the <i>reception management system</i> (IT 4)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of changes in capacity of the Italian authorities to reduce coordination and information gaps (IT 5)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of changes in capacity of the Italian authorities to manage and monitor the asylum and reception systems (IT 5)</p>	<p>planned; any changes were duly justified</p> <p>Intended outputs and outcomes were achieved; any changes were duly justified</p> <p>Achieved outcomes can be attributed to EASO's support</p>	<p>Results framework</p> <p>Internal operational monitoring</p> <p>Previous evaluations (for context)</p> <p>Relevant documents pertaining to other actions (e.g., at national/regional/local level, by IOs, by civil society organisations (CSOs))</p> <p>Interviews with all stakeholders</p>

Operationalised questions	Indicators / descriptors	Norms / judgement criteria	Indicative sources of evidence
<p><i>What factors helped or hindered the achievement of the targets and intended results?</i></p> <p><i>Could anything more have been done?</i></p> <p><i>Did the intervention contribute to the intended long-term impacts, or are they likely to have a long-term impact in the future?</i></p>	<p>Evidence / examples of enhanced and integrated information systems (IT 5)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of factors that helped and/or hindered the achievement of intended results (all measures)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of the impact of EASO's support compared to other (external or internal) factors (all measures)</p> <p>Evidence / examples of adjustments made during 2021 to mitigate resource and/or operational constraints (all measures)</p> <p>Stakeholder views on the degree to which the outcomes can be attributed to the interventions</p> <p>Evidence/examples of (external) influencing factors and their impact on the achievements of the OP</p>		
<p>Priority question: In the context of voluntary relocation, has EASO been able to fulfil its role? Why/why not? What factors enabled/inhibited it doing so?</p> <p><u>Prompts:</u></p> <p><i>Measure IT1.B: To what extent was there timely coordination of the main stakeholders, including in emergency situations such as SAR disembarkation events and voluntary relocation? Why or why not?</i></p> <p><i>What did EASO set out to achieve in terms of supporting SAR, disembarkation and voluntary relocation operations</i></p>	<p>Intervention logic and its causal links</p> <p>Degree of achievement of targets (output and outcome level) set out in the results framework</p> <p>Evidence of links between the inputs/activities and the achievement of outputs and outcomes</p> <p>Stakeholder views on the degree to which the outcomes can be attributed to the interventions</p> <p>Evidence / examples of challenges faced by EASO and other stakeholders</p> <p>Evidence/examples of (external) influencing factors and their impact on the achievements of the OP</p>	<p>EASO has been able to fill its role in relation to voluntary relocation; any shortcomings were duly justified</p>	<p>OP 2021</p> <p>Previous OPs (for context)</p> <p>Results framework</p> <p>Internal operational monitoring</p> <p>Previous evaluations (for context)</p> <p>Relevant documents pertaining to other actions (e.g., at</p>

Operationalised questions	Indicators / descriptors	Norms / judgement criteria	Indicative sources of evidence
<p><i>additional to what stated in the OP? (Linked to recommendation 2 of the OP 2020 evaluation)</i></p> <p><i>Is there evidence of links between the activities implemented / support provided and the achieved outputs and outcomes?</i></p> <p><i>What internal or external factors influenced (positively or negatively) the achievements? To what extent have these factors influenced the outcomes?</i></p> <p><i>What were the key challenges faced in the context of SAR, disembarkation and voluntary relocation operations? How were these addressed by EASO?</i></p> <p><i>Are there any lessons to be learned from the experience?</i></p>	<p>Evidence / examples of lessons learned</p>		<p>national/regional/local level, by IOs, by CSOs)</p> <p>Interviews with all stakeholders</p>
<p>Efficiency: To what extent are the costs of the intervention in Italy justified given what has been achieved, and what factors influenced the efficiency of the intervention?</p>			
<p>What costs were associated with the implementation of the intervention in Italy? Is there room for efficiency gains? Do the benefits of the intervention in Italy outweigh the costs?</p> <p><u>Prompts:</u></p> <p><i>How were the costs distributed across the six measures? Was this distribution appropriate?</i></p> <p><i>What internal or external factors influenced the efficiency with which outputs / outcomes were achieved? Were there notable differences across the six measures?</i></p> <p><i>To what extent and how could the efficiency of the intervention be improved?</i></p>	<p>Implementation costs of the intervention(s) (monetary/FTEs)</p> <p>Outputs and outcomes generated compared to their costs</p> <p>Costs and benefits for different groups of stakeholders</p> <p>Stakeholder views on the degree to which costs are proportionate to the outcomes achieved</p> <p>Evidence / examples of inefficiencies in implementation / achievement of outputs and outcomes</p>	<p>The costs of the intervention were justified compared to the achieved outputs and outcomes</p> <p>Encountered inefficiencies were appropriately addressed / mitigated by EASO</p>	<p>Cost data from EASO and other stakeholders (where available)</p> <p>OP 2021</p> <p>Results framework</p> <p>Internal operational monitoring</p> <p>Previous evaluations</p> <p>Interviews with EASO</p> <p>Interviews with authorities</p>

Operationalised questions	Indicators / descriptors	Norms / judgement criteria	Indicative sources of evidence
<i>How were costs and benefits distributed across stakeholder groups? Were they balanced/ proportionate?</i>	Evidence / examples of ways in which efficiency could be improved		Results from the evaluation of effectiveness
Coherence: To what extent is the intervention in Italy coherent internally, and with other interventions that have similar objectives?			
<p>Internal coherence: Were there any inconsistencies or contradictions between the activities of the IT intervention? Were they complementary, working together to achieve coherent outcomes?</p> <p><u>Prompts:</u></p> <p><i>Were the measures mutually reinforcing? How were they coordinated and did this work well? (Specific focus on coherence between IT 1B and IT 4)</i></p> <p><i>Was the coordination between stakeholders, including in emergency situations such as SAR disembarkation events and voluntary relocation, sufficient? Was it timely? Did it work well? (Linked to priority question 1)</i></p> <p><i>What lessons can be learned for the future in terms of the internal coherence of EASO's support?</i></p> <p>External coherence: Was EASO's work complementary to other sources of support or was there unnecessary overlap or duplication?</p> <p><u>Prompts:</u></p> <p><i>Which other interventions (funded by the EU, e.g., AMIF, or funded through national/regional/local funds) were relevant to EASO's work in Italy?</i></p>	<p>Evidence / examples of inconsistencies or contradictions between activities</p> <p>Evidence / examples of mutual reinforcement or complementarity between activities and measures</p> <p>Evidence / examples of mechanism in place for coordination</p> <p>Evidence / examples of other interventions with similar objectives/results (at national/regional/local level, by IOs, by CSOs)</p> <p>Degree of involvement of different actors in SAR, disembarkation, voluntary relocation operations</p> <p>Stakeholder views on the appropriateness of the approach taken by EASO</p> <p>Evidence / examples of lessons learned for the future</p> <p>Evidence / examples of synergies or complementarity between other interventions and the EASO intervention</p> <p>Evidence / examples of overlaps or duplication between other interventions and the EASO intervention</p>	<p>There are no inconsistencies or contradictions within the intervention, they were mutually reinforcing</p> <p>The EASO intervention and interventions by other actors are mutually reinforcing and/or complementary, there were no unnecessary overlaps or duplications</p>	<p>OP 2021</p> <p>Internal operational monitoring</p> <p>Previous evaluations</p> <p>Relevant documents pertaining to other actions (e.g., at national/regional/local level, by IOs, by CSOs)</p> <p>Interview with DG HOME</p> <p>Interviews with EASO personnel</p> <p>Interviews with authorities</p> <p>Interviews with external stakeholders</p> <p>Coherence analysis</p> <p>Results from the evaluation of effectiveness</p>

Operationalised questions	Indicators / descriptors	Norms / judgement criteria	Indicative sources of evidence
<p><i>To what extent was cooperation with the AMIF Managing Authority established / improved? What actions were taken as a result? (Linked to recommendation 5 of the OP 2020 evaluation)</i></p> <p><i>Which other stakeholders were involved in SAR and voluntary disembarkation events and in which capacity? (Linked to priority question)</i></p> <p><i>Were the actions of different actors mutually reinforcing / complementary or were there any issues encountered? (Linked to priority question)</i></p> <p><i>Was there sufficient communication and coordination between the relevant actors to facilitate the achievement of results? (Linked to priority question)</i></p> <p><i>Were any inconsistencies identified? Were the interventions mutually complementary?</i></p>	<p>Stakeholder views on the coherence and complementarity of the interventions (or lack thereof)</p>		
<p>EU added value: What is the additional value resulting from the EASO intervention in Italy, compared to what could reasonably have been expected from Member States acting at national and/or regional levels?</p>			
<p>What was the added value of EASO's intervention compared to what the Italian authorities could have achieved alone?</p> <p><u>Prompts:</u></p> <p><i>What was EASO's added value in relation to the CEAS?</i></p> <p><i>What was EASO's added value in relation to pressure on the reception and asylum system?</i></p>	<p>Evidence / examples of added value of the intervention in Italy</p> <p>Extent to which the activities would not have taken place or taken place with a reduced scope or speed in the absence of the intervention in Italy</p> <p>Stakeholder views on what would have happened without EASO's support in Italy</p>	<p>The intervention added value compared to what could have been achieved in its absence</p>	<p>Interviews with EASO personnel</p> <p>Interviews with authorities</p> <p>Results from all previous evaluation questions</p>

Operationalised questions	Indicators / descriptors	Norms / judgement criteria	Indicative sources of evidence
<p><i>Is there evidence suggesting that the outcomes of the intervention could not have been achieved to the same degree without the intervention?</i></p>			
<p>Sustainability: What is the likelihood that the results of the intervention in Italy will be sustained, and what mechanisms were introduced to ensure this?</p>			
<p>What mechanisms (if any) to ensure the sustainability of results have been put in place by EASO and / or the authorities? Is this sufficient to ensure the sustainability of the results?</p> <p><u>Prompts:</u></p> <p><i>Was a phase-out plan agreed on with MOI DPS? If so, is it on track? (Linked to recommendation 1 of the OP 2020 evaluation)</i></p> <p><i>Were synergies across all levels of the judicial authorities involved in EASO operations promoted? To what extent did this impact on sustainability? (Linked to recommendation 4 of the OP 2020 recommendation)</i></p> <p><i>To what extent was training improved? To what extent did this improve the capacity of the Italian authorities? (Linked to recommendation 6 of the OP 2020 evaluation)</i></p>	<p>Intervention logic (<i>impact level</i>)</p> <p>Examples / evidence of long-term impacts of the intervention in Italy</p> <p>Stakeholder expectations on long-term impacts of the intervention in Italy</p> <p>Evidence / examples of mechanisms put in place to help the intervention in Italy continue beyond its direct implementation</p> <p>Evidence / examples of factors influencing the likely impact and sustainability of the intervention in Italy</p> <p>Evidence / examples of ways in which these mechanisms ensure sustainability of results in Italy</p> <p>Stakeholder views on the likelihood that the benefits of the intervention could continue beyond the intervention's implementation in Italy</p>	<p>EASO's support is likely to have a lasting impact</p> <p>Appropriate mechanisms have been put in place to stimulate sustainability of the intervention</p>	<p>OP 2021</p> <p>Internal operational monitoring</p> <p>Internal training plans</p> <p>Previous evaluations</p> <p>Interviews with EASO personnel</p> <p>Interview with DG HOME</p> <p>Interviews with authorities</p> <p>Interviews with IOM/Frontex</p> <p>Results from all other evaluation questions</p>

Annex 3 Follow-up on the OP 2020 evaluation recommendations

The table below sets out the progress made in 2021 in relation to the recommendations of the evaluation of Italy OP 2020.

Table 3. Recommendations from 2020 evaluation

Recommendation	Status	Progress / achievements
1. Agree, together with MoI DPS, on a medium-term phase-out plan.	Under implementation	Considering the high increase of the disembarkation events in 2021 and upon stakeholder's request, a long-term strategy was discussed with the stakeholder in the context of the negotiations for the next OP 2022-2024.
2. Increase support to SAR disembarkation and relocation.	Implementation concluded	In the OP 2021 a sub-measure was dedicated to the support to voluntary relocation and a measure will be dedicated to voluntary relocation in the OP 2022-2024 with the possibility to increase resources if needed to promptly respond to crisis.
3. Support the setting-up and roll-out of a reception quality monitoring system at central and local level.	Under implementation	In 2021 EASO Italy increased the number of RISOs deployed on the field at local level, and further increase in the number of the resources is foreseen in the OP 2022-2024. The tool for data consolidation and analysis of results of monitoring visits done by the <i>Servizio Centrale</i> was updated in 2021 under measure 4.
4. Promote synergies across all levels of the judicial authorities involved in EASO operations to maximise impact and sustainability.	Under implementation	Actions concluded: Meetings/thematic round tables were organised to share good practices and issues faced at local level. Under implementation: The feasibility study for the creation of an Inter-ministerial COI Unit to support cooperation among relevant stakeholders will be finalised under the OP 2022-2024.
5. Establish cooperation with the AMIF Managing Authority.	Implementation partially concluded	Concluded actions: Cooperation with the Authority was established and is ongoing. A workflow was established at EASO central level, mostly as a result of the transition into EUAA, whereby the AMIF National Programmes are shared with EASO for comments before their approval. Under implementation: In terms of exploring the recovery fund as potential source of funds, the Ministry of Justice will use these funds to recruit new

			administrative resources in support to judiciary as of 2022. Support to the professional development of these resources has been requested by the Ministry of Justice and is included in the OP 2022-2024.
6. Increase the capacity of partners through an enhanced training strategy.	Implementation concluded	partially	<p>Concluded actions: In 2021 numerous capacity building activities to support the quality of EASO's intervention have been organised (mostly under measures 1 and 3) as well as training on MedCOI (measure 2) and thematic roundtables for judges (measure 3).</p> <p>Under implementation: National training sessions have been delivered by national stakeholders and four more are foreseen under the OP 2022-2024.</p> <p>Discontinued: The action related to the coaching on the job led by ASTs on managing and processing of Dublin requests, litigation and transfer monitoring tool for DCLI Dublin officials and AMIF staff was discontinued. The support in the coordination of three professional development activities, organised by the SSM in cooperation with EASO, was also discontinued.</p>
7. Consider multi-annual planning for operational support to Italy.	Implementation concluded	partially	A three-year planning cycle was introduced with the signing of the OP 2022-2024.