

European Asylum Support Office

Independent external Evaluation of EASO's activities covering
the period from February 2011 to June 2014

Final Report - Annexes

December 2015



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ANNEX 1 - Evaluation framework

A1.1 Working practices

Evaluation question

A. To what extent are EASO working practices adequate to fulfil its mandate?

List of sub-questions and judgement criteria

A.1 Is EASO's governance and management structure appropriate for carrying out the agency's duties?

- ▶ The organisation and functioning of the Management Board enable it to fulfil its role of steering and supervisory body
- ▶ The involvement of Member States through working groups and networks is effective.
- ▶ The structure of EASO administration allows for effective decision making process. The communication between EASO's units/centres and the Executive Director is frequent and enables an efficient sharing of information
- ▶ The division of work between units is justified by their specific competencies or types of activity

A.2 Are the organisational procedures of EASO adequate in order to implement its mandate?

- ▶ The definition of EASO's strategy through the drafting of the Multi-Annual Work Programme (MAWP) and the Annual Work Programmes (AWP) enables EASO to adequately implement its mandate.
- ▶ Clarity of tasks allocation, identification of responsibilities and related means in EASO's planning documents.

A.3 To what extent are EASO internal knowledge sharing and internal and external communication effective?

- ▶ EASO staff members can access, share and communicate easily and share the information needed for the implementation of EASO's activities
 - ▶ EASO has developed effective tools for the exchange of information and pooling of knowledge with the civil society
 - ▶ Relevant stakeholders in the field of asylum at the national and European level know EASO and the types of support offered
-

A1.2 Efficiency

Evaluation question

B. To what extent has EASO been efficient in implementing its mandate?

List of sub-questions and judgement criteria

B.1 How efficient has EASO been in utilising its human and financial resources?

- ▶ Expenditure is concentrated on the five clusters of activity and evolving according to the development of these activities
- ▶ Internal supporting tasks are implemented at a reasonable price
- ▶ Fixed costs (building/equipment) represent a reasonable part of its budget
- ▶ EASO's human and financial resources are sufficient to the implementation of its mandate

B.2 To what extent and how have external factors influenced the efficiency of the Agency?

- ▶ EASO has updated its procedures by taking into account external factors
- ▶ Considering external factors has had a positive impact on the efficiency of the Agency

A1.3 Relevance & internal consistency

Evaluation question

C. To what extent are the EASO's mandate and activities adequate to answer to the needs of the EU and its Member States?

List of sub-questions and judgement criteria

C.1 To what extent are the EASO's mission and tasks, as enshrined in its founding Regulation, relevant to address Member State needs?

- ▶ The mission of EASO, as described in Regulation 439/2010, covers all the needs expressed by Member States and EU stakeholders
- ▶ The duties enshrined in EASO's Regulation provide adequate answers to the needs expressed by Member States and EU stakeholders

C.2 To what extent does EASO take into account the concrete needs expressed by MS and stakeholders in developing its work plan, strategies and activities?

- ▶ EASO provides Member States and other stakeholders with adequate tools for the expression of their needs
- ▶ Stakeholders at the EU and national level contribute to identify the needs for training, data collection, COI and operational support

-
- ▶ EASO analyses and takes into account the needs expressed by MS and other stakeholders
 - ▶ EASO classifies and arranges MS' needs according to the its main activities (permanent, special, emergency support, etc.) and on the basis of a clear and defined methodology

C.3 To what extent is EASO able to respectively revise the analysis of expressed MS' needs and adapt the activities planned to new emerging needs?

- ▶ EASO takes into account the quantitative and qualitative evolutions of MS' needs
- ▶ EASO, in carrying out its activities, is able to adapt to changing EU and MS needs
- ▶ EASO is able to timely respond to the requests of EU institutions and MS

C.4 To what extent do the implemented activities correspond to EASO's mandate, as laid down in its founding Regulation and other relevant legal documents?

- ▶ The goals set out in the Work Programme are in keeping with EASO's mandate as laid out in the EASO Regulation
- ▶ EASO's implemented activities fall within its mandate as laid out by the Regulation
- ▶ Successive policy and legal documents have introduced new operational objectives and extended the scope of EASO activities

A1.4 Effectiveness

Evaluation question

D. To what extent has EASO achieved the objectives set forth by its founding Regulation?

List of sub-questions and judgement criteria

D.1 To what extent have EASO's activities contributed to the implementation of its mandate, as laid down in its Regulation and other relevant legal documents?

- ▶ EASO's duties and objectives provided by the Regulation are fully transposed in its activities;
- ▶ EASO's activities are coherent and adequate in implementing EASO's mandate as per its founding Regulation

D.2 To what extent has EASO been successful in performing its activities and achieving its operational objectives?

- ▶ EASO's indicators planned in the work programme are fully and timely achieved
- ▶ EASO has been effective in providing high quality and relevant training to MS
- ▶ EASO has been effective in providing information and analysis support, including COI to MS
- ▶ EASO has been effective in providing operational (emergency and special) to MS

D.3 To what extent has EASO been able to engage relevant EU stakeholders in its work, including non-state actors?

- ▶ EASO communicates effectively and openly with relevant stakeholders in the field of asylum
- ▶ EASO takes into account relevant stakeholders' contribution in planning and carrying out its activities
- ▶ EASO's cooperates effectively with the Consultative Forum in line with the Regulation

D.4 To what extent and how have external factors influenced the effectiveness of the Agency?

- ▶ EASO's overall legal framework has been able to face the evolving and emerging needs and expectations
- ▶ EASO has taken actions to face increasing workload and to timely respond to MS requests
- ▶ EASO has been able to forecast potential risks related to external factors, which could have affected the effectiveness of its activities

A1.5 Impacts

Evaluation question

E. To what extent has EASO effectively contributed to the coherent implementation of the CEAS?

List of sub-questions and judgement criteria

E.1 To what extent have the activities of EASO improved practical cooperation among MS in the field of asylum and reception?

- ▶ Practical cooperation amongst Member States has been strengthened due to the creation of EASO
- ▶ Member State practices in the field of asylum are gradually converging
- ▶ Differences in the practical application of EU asylum legislation are reduced at EU level

E.2 To what extent has EASO been able to engage MS in effective solidarity and supporting MS under pressure?

- ▶ Thanks to EASO, Member States are more aware of the importance of mutual support under the Common European Asylum System.
- ▶ Member States actively contribute to the Asylum Intervention Pool and Asylum Support Teams

E.3 To what extent have the activities of EASO facilitated the development of the CEAS and in particular the implementation of the EU asylum package?

- ▶ EASO is recognised as a reference point in the field of asylum by national and European stakeholders
 - ▶ Information produced by EASO is used and taken into account for policy making by EU institutions
 - ▶ Member States, the Commission and EASO coordinate their action on asylum-related issues
-

A1.6 EU value added & external coherence

Evaluation question

F. To what extent has the creation of EASO provided added value to the European asylum policy, without duplicating the existing?

List of sub-questions

F.1 What have been the advantages of acting at EU level since the creation of EASO?

- ▶ EASO actions are more cost-effective than individual MS actions
- ▶ EASO provided information and outputs that could not have been done at EU level
- ▶ EASO has reduced the duplication of work in the field of asylum in the EU

F.2 Is the relationship between the EASO and its national and EU stakeholders well organised and satisfying?

- ▶ Effectiveness of EASO's external communication strategy
- ▶ Coordination with EU and national stakeholders is satisfying

F.3 What is the added value of EASO with respect to other instruments in the field of migration and asylum?

- ▶ EASO carries out support activities that are not already and could not be effectively provided by the other EU agencies
 - ▶ EASO and the other agencies cooperate on cross-related issues as often as needed
 - ▶ The division of tasks between EASO and the other agencies enable them to fulfil their mandate in the most appropriate and efficient way
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ANNEX 2 – Data collection report

A2.1 Management Board interviews

All Management Board members were contacted by 20 February 2015, with most interviewed over the phone. In a few instances, face-to-face interviews were able to be organised, whereas some other representatives preferred to answer in writing.

Overall 31 Management Board members were successfully interviewed. In a couple of isolated cases, the interviews had to be Unavailable, due to the lack of response from the concerned representatives. More specifically, the interviews with the Management Board representatives of the Czech Republic, Iceland and Portugal could not be carried out.

A2.2 EASO staff interviews

Group interviews

Group interviews with staff members of EASO within each of the four units, namely CTQE, COS, CIDA and GAAU were held on 12 and 13 February, 2015. During these interactive sessions, all participants were given the opportunity to express their opinion in confidentiality, giving staff the possibility to put forward their ideas without their direct management present during these meetings.

Participants were split as follows:

- ▶ General Affairs and Administration Unit (GAAU) – 13
- ▶ Centre for Training, Quality and Expertise (CTQE) – 9
- ▶ Centre for Operational Support (COS) – 8
- ▶ Centre for Information, Documentation and analysis (CIDA) – 12

In brief, participants were initially asked to explain the objectives of their specific Unit. Following a group discussion on these objectives, participants were split into smaller groups (usually by specific Unit process or output) and asked to list the strengths and weaknesses of existing Unit and EASO working practices. Finally, these sub-groupings were invited to put forward their recommendations on how both interactions with other Units and with Member States could be improved as ways of improving efficiency.

Individual interviews

To complement the Group interviews mentioned in the previous section, a number of individual interviews were held during the inception and data collection phase. These individual interviews were held primarily with each member of management including the following:

- ▶ Executive Director

- ▶ Members of the Executive Office (including the policy and interinstitutional relations coordinator, communications officer, and legal officer)
- ▶ Each of the Heads of units (CTQE, COS, CIDA, GAAU)

The latter were not participant to the staff group workshop held as mentioned, and were interviewed individually twice, first during the inception and later on at the end of the data collection phase.

A2.3 EU stakeholders interviews

A series of interviews were carried out with various stakeholders at EU level, including:

- ▶ European Commission, DG Home Affairs,
- ▶ European Parliament's Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee,
- ▶ Council and in particular the Strategic Committee on Immigration, Frontier and Asylum (SCIFA) and the High Level Working Group (HLWG),
- ▶ Other EU agencies,
- ▶ International organisations working on asylum and migration,
- ▶ NGO representatives from the Consultative forum.

In total, 10 interviews were carried out, ranging from EU agencies directors, NGOs representatives and Members of the European Parliament.

As shown in the table below, some interviews had to be Unavailable due to repeated denial or absence of response from the potential interviewees.

Table 1: EU stakeholders interviewed

Organisation	Name of the interviewee	Interview status
European Commission – DG Home Affaires	Laurent Muschel	Done
European Commission – DG Home Affaires	Bartłomiej Balcerzyk	Done
European Parliament - Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee	Jean Lambert	Done
Strategic Committee on Immigration, Frontier and Asylum (SCIFA)	Christine Roger	Done
European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (FRONTEX)	Fabrice Leggeri	Done
EUROJUST	Michèle Coninx	Done
European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)	Adriano Silvestri	Done
European Migration Network (EMN)	Magnus Ovilius	Done

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)	Vincent Cochetel	Done
European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)	Michael Diedring	Done
EU Red Cross	Anaïs Faure Atger	Done
Asylum Research Consultancy (ARC)	Stephanie Huber & Liz Williams	Done
European Parliament - Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee	Monika Hohlmeier	Unavailable
International Organization for Migration (IOM)	Eugenio Ambrosi	Unavailable
Amnesty International	Anneliese Baldaccini	Unavailable

A2.4 Survey

The electronic surveys launched through a dedicated EY online platform were targeted at a spectrum of stakeholders involved in and/or having interest in the implementation of EASO's activities. The contents of these surveys were discussed and approved by the EASO Steering Committee, together with the final inception report on 3 February 2015.

This was followed by a pilot test of each of the three questionnaires, carried out with representatives from each group of contacts provided by EASO. The testing of the surveys was carried out face to face or through phone conversation with representatives to collect thorough feedback on the content of all surveys. Following the test phase, the survey questionnaires were slightly modified based on the suggestion of the first interviewees.

A total of three different surveys, seeking to collect information / perception from the following categories of stakeholders were circulated in early March as follows:

- ▶ Survey targeting National Stakeholders
- ▶ Survey targeting Pool of Experts and Trainers
- ▶ Survey targeting Members of National Courts and Tribunals

The surveys were closed one month from the launch date and responses were taken as final on 9 April 2015.

Survey targeting National Stakeholders

The launch of the electronic Survey targeting National Stakeholders took place on 9 March 2015. The distribution list of this survey included the following categories of stakeholders:

- ▶ National Contact Points (NCPs)
- ▶ Members of the COI strategic network
- ▶ National common portal administrators on COI (NCPAs)
- ▶ Training contact points

- ▶ Quality contact points
- ▶ Statistics contact points

The questionnaire focused on a number of questions, grouped according to the respondent profile, mainly:

- ▶ Stakeholders' opinion on the overall effectiveness and quality of EASO's activities
- ▶ Information on the stakeholder's role in and perception of EASO's permanent / operational / special / emergency support activity
- ▶ Information on the stakeholder's role in and perception of EASO's information and analysis support activity
- ▶ Information on the stakeholder's perception and use of COI produced by EASO
- ▶ Information on the stakeholder's role in and perception of EASO's Third country support activity
- ▶ Information on the stakeholder's opinion on the added value of acting at the European level through EASO

The following illustration provides an overview of the number of respondents targeted by the survey for National Stakeholders and the responses received up to the closing date of the survey.

Table 2: Survey for National Stakeholders – Responses as at April 9, 2015

Survey for National Stakeholders	
197 contacts provided by EASO (including undelivered messages)*	
183 successful recipients	35%* of successful respondents – *(64/183 respondents) Completed 100% of the Survey for National Stakeholders
	42%* of successful respondents – *(76/183 respondents) Completed 90% of the Survey for National Stakeholders

*It is important to note that a number of contact details have proved to be incorrect and therefore some of the survey invitations remain undelivered. The number of undelivered messages was 14, representing 7% of total contacts identified by EASO.

Survey targeting EASO's pool of Experts and Trainers

The Survey targeting the pool of Experts and Trainers was launched on 10 March 2015. The distribution list for this survey includes the network of experts identified by EASO, for having participated to the operational and emergency support plans, as part of the Asylum Intervention Pool, as well as for having delivered the Train the Trainers seminars.

The questionnaire seeks to gather feedback from experts / trainers mainly on the following:

- ▶ Experts'/ trainers' opinion on the identification and selection process
- ▶ Information and feedback on the deployment experience in EASO's operational support activity
- ▶ Information on the overall relevance and effectiveness of EASO's training curriculum
- ▶ Understating the experts'/trainers' overall perception of EASO

The following illustration provides an overview of the number of respondents targeted by the survey for Pool of Experts and Trainers and the response received to date:

Table 3: Survey for pool of Experts and Trainers – Responses as at April 9, 2015

Survey for pool of Experts and Trainers	
484 contacts provided by EASO (including undelivered messages)*	
446 successful recipients	21%* of successful recipients- *(92/446 respondents) Completed 100% of the Surveys for Pool of Experts and Trainers
	26%* of successful respondents – *(115/446 respondents) Completed 40% of the Survey for National Stakeholders

*A significant number of contact details from the distribution list of the pool of experts and trainers have proved to be incorrect and therefore some of the invitations to complete the survey could not be delivered. A total of 38 messages remain undelivered, representing 8% of total contacts identified by EASO in the pool of Experts and Trainers.

Survey targeting Members of National Courts and Tribunals

The Survey for Members of National Courts and Tribunals was also launched on 10 March 2015. This survey is targeted mainly at the Judiciary involved in EASO's activities and other asylum related judicial associations from all Member States.

The questions asked in the survey for Members of National Courts and Tribunals include mainly:

- ▶ Information on EASO's events, their quality and visibility
- ▶ Opinion on the quality of EASO's information products and services
- ▶ Opinion on the overall effectiveness of EASO's activity

The below illustration provides an overview of the number of respondents targeted by the survey for Members of National Courts and Tribunals and the responses received to date:

Table 4: Survey for Members of Courts and Tribunals –Responses as at April 9, 2015

Survey for Members of Court and Tribunals	
123 contacts provided by EASO (including undelivered messages)*	
104 successful recipients	16%* of successful recipients *(17/32 respondents) Completed 100% of the Survey for Members of National Courts and Tribunals
	14%* of successful recipients *(14/32 respondents) Completed 75% of the Survey for Members of National Courts and Tribunals

*A number of contact details have proved to be incorrect and therefore some of the email correspondence sent as a request to complete the survey has been undelivered to the correct respondent. A total of 19 messages remain undelivered, representing 15% of contacts provided by EASO as the Members of National Courts and Tribunals

A2.5 Case study interviews

A series of case studies, including both primary and secondary data collection, has been performed to gather more/deeper information on EASO activities, added-value, and impact at national level and analyse EASO’s mission in relation to national needs and situations. Each case study included three to five interviews with representatives of the national administration, local NGOs and asylum experts to collect their opinion on:

- ▶ EASO strategy and activities,
- ▶ The relevance of EASO mission to Member State needs,
- ▶ The quality of relations with the Agency,
- ▶ The main impact of EASO support,
- ▶ The added-value of EASO’s activities, as perceived at national level.

As agreed by the Steering group during the inception phase, the six case studies focused on the following Member States: France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Bulgaria and Sweden.

For each country, the EASO Management Board member was interviewed and asked to identify relevant stakeholders within the national asylum system. The national UNHCR representative was also systematically contacted for an interview. A wide range of stakeholders, ranging from academia to asylum officers were contacted, although some interviews had to be Unavailable due to lack of response from the potential interviewees.

In addition to the Management Board members, 33 stakeholders have been contacted for the case studies and 21 interviews were successfully performed by May 29, 2015.

Table 5: Case studies interviews conducted in France

Organisation	Interview Status
Office François de protection des réfugiés et apatrides (OFPRA)	Done
Forum réfugiés (NGO)	Done
Cour nationale du droit d'asile (CNDA)	Done
Odysseus Network	Unavailable
Odysseus Network	Unavailable
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)	Done

Table 6: Case studies interviews conducted in Germany

Organisation	Interview Status
Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF)	Done
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)	Done
Odysseus Network	Unavailable
Odysseus Network	Unavailable
Proasyl (NGO)	Awaiting response

Table 7: Case studies interviews conducted in Greece

Organisation	Interview Status
Greek Asylum Service	Done
Greek First Reception Service	Done
METAction (NGO)	Done
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)	Done
Greek Appeal Authority	Unavailable

Table 8: Case studies interviews conducted in Italy

Organisation	Interview Status
Ministero dell'Interno	Done
Ministero dell'Interno	Done
Università degli Studi di Firenze	Done
Associazione Studi Giuridici Immigrazione	Done
Commissione Territoriale Crotone	Done

Table 9: Case studies interviews conducted in Bulgaria

Organisation	Interview Status
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Sofia	Done
International Affairs Directorate (EASO Expert)	Done
Refugee and Migrant Program Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (NGO)	Done
The Bulgarian Academy of Sciences	Unavailable
Independent legal expert on non-discrimination law	Unavailable

Table 10: Case studies interviews conducted in Sweden

Organisation	Interview Status
Administrative Court in Gothenburg	Done
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Sweden	Done
Senior Country Analyst, Swedish Migration Board	Done
EASO seconded national expert - Greece	Unavailable
The Swedish Network of Refugee Support Groups (FARR)	Unavailable
EASO expert	Unavailable
Legal expert on non-discrimination law	Unavailable

Five out of six case studies have been finished. The case on Sweden could not be completed, since the identified interviewees were mostly unavailable and no representative of the civil society could be interviewed. The case study reports on Bulgaria, France, Germany, Greece and Italy are available at Annex 3, starting from p. 15.

ANNEX 3 - Case Study reports

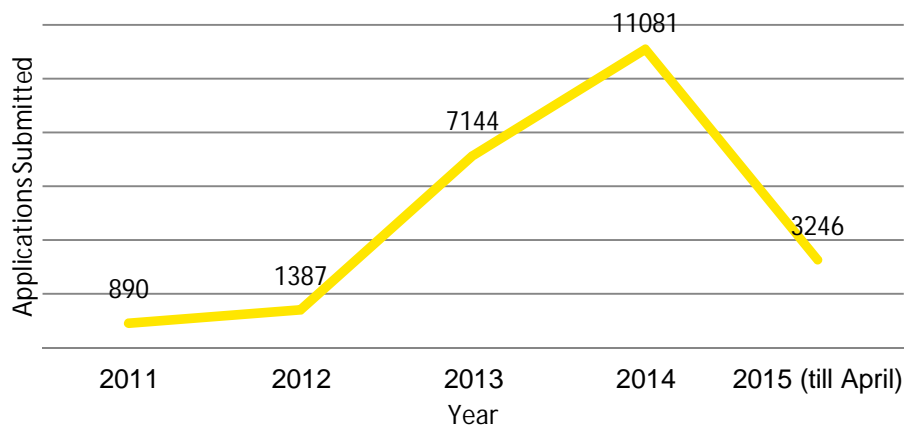
The case studies are presented in the following chapters. The case study for Germany will be provided in a next version of the document.

A3.1 Bulgaria

The context: Asylum situation at national level

With a population of 7.97 million, Bulgaria is situated in south-eastern Europe, bordering Romania, Serbia, the Republic of Macedonia, Greece, Turkey and the Black Sea¹. As an 'EU external border state on the Eastern Mediterranean migration route', Bulgaria continues to be under severe migratory and refugee pressure². Bulgaria has seen especially large increases in the number of asylum seekers in the last few years. Around 11,000 applications were received in 2014, which was the highest number of applications since 1993. The chart below highlights the total number of applications submitted by asylum seekers between 2011 and 2015.

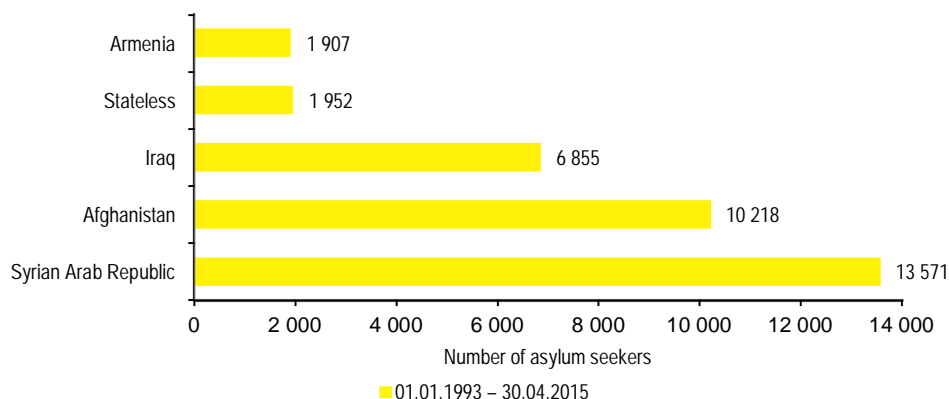
Figure 1: Applications received in Bulgaria (2011 – 2015)



Source: Bulgarian State Agency for Refugees

Bulgaria's geographical position exposes the country to various groups of asylum seekers. As outlined below, the majority of asylum seekers in Bulgaria originate from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Algeria³⁴):

Figure 2: Top five refugee countries of origin (01.01.1993 – 30.04.2015)



¹ <http://www.government.bg/cgi-bin/e-cms/vis/vis.pl?s=001&p=0159&n=000003&g=>

² EASO (2014), EASO Special support plan to Bulgaria, pg. 3

³ <http://www.unhcr-centraleurope.org/en/where-we-work/operations-in-central-europe/bulgaria.html>

⁴ <http://www.aref.government.bg/?cat=21>

In 2013, Bulgaria faced further pressure on its asylum system due to a 416 % increase in the number of applicants compared to 2012. The ongoing crisis in Syria has been the main driver for the significant increase in asylum seeker applications since 2013 whereby the number of Syrian applicants was ten times greater than in 2012. Accordingly, Bulgaria experienced the largest percentage increase (902%) in Syrian applications when compared to all other EU member States and ranked in the top three Member States for receiving applications from Syrian asylum seekers during 2013⁵.

Further to the above, it is pertinent to note that according to the Annual Report Situation of Asylum in the European Union 2013, Bulgaria achieved an 88% positive decision rate at first instance in 2013. This was the highest positive decision rate achieved by all EU Member States and is primarily attributable to the fact that applications received were almost exclusively from countries with very poor security situations.

The following sections are based on the evidence gathered from the interviews held with representatives from the following Bulgarian stakeholders, namely a MB member, national authorities and two NGOs directly involved in the system. Where relevant, the evidence has been compared with information gathered from the various e-surveys and from existing EASO and third-party reports.

National strategy / policy

In Bulgaria, the State Agency for Refugees (SAR) is responsible for registering, examining, and making decisions on applications for international protection. SAR employs over 120 people and is head quartered in Sofia. Its activities in Bulgaria are carried out through a number of territorial units across the country.

Bulgaria has set up an inter-institutional working group that is responsible for developing a National Plan on the implementation of additional measures for action in a situation of increased migratory pressure. Indeed, over the evaluation period the Bulgarian asylum system has undergone a number of important developments and the number of employees at the State Agency for Refugees has increased accordingly.

As a result of the increase in the number of asylum seekers, the number of reception and accommodation centres of SAR increased over the evaluation period. As a result of Bulgaria's ongoing efforts to strengthen the reception system, living conditions in the centres were significantly improved and the current total accommodation capacity amounts to over 6,000 places.

Interaction with EASO

Since 2011, Bulgaria has witnessed a large increase in the number of asylum seekers, which has put the asylum and reception systems under severe pressure. Challenges faced by Bulgaria during this period were outlined in the latest EASO Annual Report⁶ and related to:

- ▶ Access to the territory and registration of applications
- ▶ Insufficient and poor reception conditions
- ▶ Lack of guardians for unaccompanied minors

⁵ EASO – Annual Report Situation of Asylum in the European Union 2013

⁶ EASO Annual Report on the Situation of Asylum in the European Union 2012

- ▶ Detention and limited administrative capacity for determining the international protection needs of asylum applicants (e.g. credibility assessments, lack of Country of Origin Information, etc.).

Due to the challenges faced, Bulgaria sought and was granted assistance by EASO in the form of an Operational Plan (OP) over 2013-2014, and a Special Support Plan (SSP) for 2014-2016. A number of support measures were agreed upon. These measures included but were not limited to support in the field of reception and support with the identification and referral of vulnerable groups at entry points and with the asylum registration process.

EASO's contribution during the first mandate (2013-2014) was to improve the "ability of the Bulgarian asylum and reception system [...] as well as to enhance the asylum capacity in a sustainable way". Additionally, EASO together with SAR invested in the development of Bulgaria's asylum and reception systems as previously highlighted. EASO organised several workshops targeting different entities and individuals, including but not limited to COI, Ad-hoc (on the Case law of the Court Justice of the European Union), and training for interpreters. By the end of September 2014, over 50 activities implemented by 64 experts were organised. The Evaluation on the Bulgarian Support plan conducted by EASO outlined a total of nine broad achievements⁸. A number of improvements could already be noted by the beginning of 2014, most notably in the area of reception conditions⁹.

While it is acknowledged that EASO has been trying to implement tailor made policies and measures, the stakeholders commented that the government is still in process of incorporating the proposed policies into their legislation and work processes. In some instances, the best policy which adequately tackles the problems and needs has still not been selected by the national authorities. Additionally, it was commented that past policies, although implemented, were not necessarily successful. Admittedly, some of the expected results could not be fully achieved due to the lack of experts available (from Member States)¹⁰. This led to incomplete implementation of some measures and delays in others. Additionally, the ongoing emergency situation in Bulgaria required a prolonged deployment of experts; which could not be implemented because the requested human resources were not available, especially for longer periods of time.

Communication is pivotal for a successful execution of the mandate. EASO channelled its communication with various stakeholders through seminars, workshops, and training sessions targeting different stakeholders and participants. Bulgarian stakeholders generally commented positively on the levels of communication with EASO. While the Asylum system is still developing, the stakeholders commented that the communication was very positive, constant and effective. Additionally, it was pointed out that interaction with EASO was instrumental for networking in a number of different areas. They also commented that EASO has been efficient in providing updates on various activities organised, including Bulgarian activities.

Relevance of EASO activities

Bulgarian interviewees provided positive comments about the relevance of EASO's activities. They mentioned that the SSP is a continuation of the OP to enhance the preparedness for reaction in cases of increased mixed migration flows, adopted at the end of 2013¹¹. During the implementation of the OP, staff members were also given training through the EASO training Curriculum, which allowed them to acquire knowledge and skills.

⁷ EASO (2014), Final Evaluation, EASO Operating Plan to Bulgaria, (pg. 7)

⁸ EASO (2014), Final Evaluation, EASO Operating Plan to Bulgaria, (pg. 29)

⁹ EASO – Annual Report Situation of Asylum in the European Union 2013

¹⁰ EASO (2014), Final Evaluation, EASO Operating Plan to Bulgaria, (pg. 29)

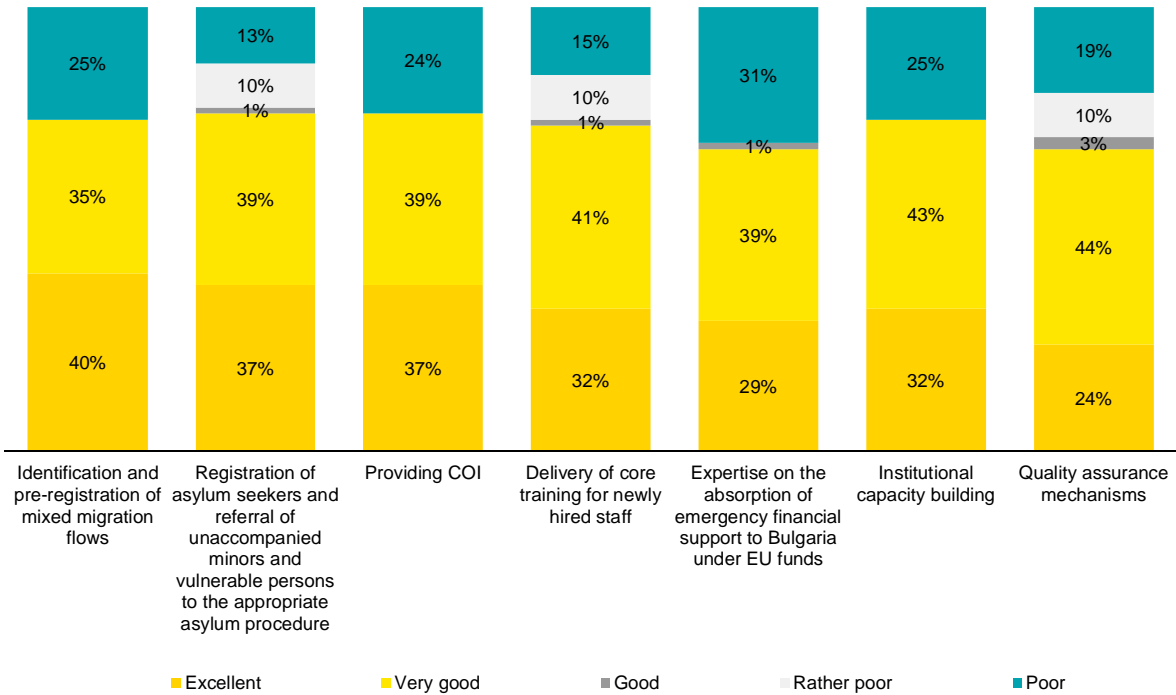
¹¹ EASO (2014), Special Support Plan To Bulgaria, (pg.6):

This was also highlighted in the responses to the interviews and survey of all caseworkers held in September 2014 by EASO, where participants showed that the training led to ‘improvements in their skills and knowledge and ability to apply them in their daily work’¹². The expansion of Bulgaria’s training capacity through train the trainer sessions the translation of materials into Bulgarian and the uploading onto the training platform also received positive comments.

Stakeholders also noted that EASO has been consistent with its objectives in the delivery of activities during the both (current and previous) support plans. Additionally, EASO is considered to provide adequate and useful activities; including training sessions and language translation sessions. Indeed, both support plans have training and tailor-made workshops at the core of every deliverable.

According to the figure below, respondents to the e-survey for pool of experts and trainers were generally satisfied that the implementation of the Emergency support plan for Bulgaria, with the “identification and pre-registration of mixed migration flow” processes considered to be excellent, while the “quality assurance mechanisms” implemented by EASO during the support plan are considered to be very good.

Figure 3: Implementation of the emergency support plan for Bulgaria



(Source: EY survey for Pool of Experts and Trainers, respondents: 26)

EASO’s activities were also instrumental in relation to COI as they offered the opportunity to network and interact with other MS. The activities allowed the stakeholders to learn and share information about COI. Additionally, they commented that the various specific activities organised showed EASO’s

¹² Pg. 14

capability to respond to the particular needs of the country. For instance, the tailor made seminars organised by CTQE in Bulgaria included intensive mini-sessions on 5 different modules¹³.

Whilst again acknowledging the improvement in situation since EASO's arrival, it was again commented that the improvement was not solely attributed to EASO but that other non-governmental actors contributed to the improvement. As previously mentioned, some interviewees commented that further involvement of other actors in the organisation of the activities and the plans of execution would be appreciated.

Effectiveness of EASO support for the MS

Most of the interviewees agreed that the emergency support plan was effective, needed, timely, and important for Bulgaria as it helped the country during a time of need. It was argued that EASO left an impact in the asylum field.

As EASO's support plan and policies are still developing and growing, stakeholders acknowledged that time is needed to develop and nurture cooperation. Dialogue between EASO's experts and the Member states is considered to be very important as it helps prepare for any problems that arise. Additionally, the activities organised by EASO allows MS to share information on COI. COI efforts, reports and manuals are very important to the various officials dealing with asylum seekers. It was acknowledged that EASO is practical in its approach by attempting to engage both trainers and staff who are familiar with procedure. This should increase the effectiveness of EASO's support. The stakeholders also commented that EASO's interventions are ultimately leading to a better, more streamlined and faster registration process, as was initially planned.

This is particularly evident with initiatives related to the training curriculum. Stakeholders are aware that this is designed for asylum officials and other target groups such as managers and legal officers throughout the EU and also other various entities or individuals such as translators judiciary members etc.. They believe that exposure of Bulgarian participants to the training offered under the different modules to be particularly effective. On the other hand, the interviewees commented that despite the good work done, at times, EASO lacks involving other actors during the development process. EASO did not always involve all stakeholders in the organisation of workshops and seminars.

Lastly, it was argued that the reports issued by EASO are based primarily on government opinions and they might not necessarily give an objective (or complete) picture. This is because government officials might not be as aware of certain issues like NGOs and other actors, and might also have a different perspective. It is important to include all possible view-points in such documents as this will ultimately lead to an even better identification of needs, measures to target those needs, and ultimately measures deliverables and outcomes.

Identification of EASO's impact on national asylum matters, on practical cooperation between the MS and other EU MS

Bulgarian stakeholders provided positive remarks on the perceived impact of EASO's work. Most interviewees believe the medium and long term changes in the field of asylum will be achieved as a result of the emergency support measures. The training provided to trainers was also noted by the stakeholders, who commented that the training was effective.

¹³ Participants in these sessions were not fully accredited on the modules, as accreditation is only possible following completion of all the steps/sections within a particular module.

The material provided was considered to be effective and is still being used (e.g. by caseworkers). The material was translated in Bulgarian, and this increased the materials usefulness to government officials and effectively eliminated any language barrier. Stakeholders generally believed that the material has improved the output of government officials.

It was argued that despite the limitation of the CEAS, EASO's contribution proved to be effective. Lastly, another interviewee wished for EASO to support the government in the transposition of relevant EU directives.

Perception on EASO's added-value

Most of the participants agree on the added-value of EASO's intervention. The participants commented that EASO's participation in Bulgaria led to an improvement in the implementation of CEAS. Some interviewees also maintained that the main reason for improvement was attributable to the support provided by the Agency.

However, while the situation has improved since EASO's intervention in the country, many believe that, unless the mandate is extended, Bulgaria will not reach its objectives. EASO acknowledges the fact the due to the limited time and resources, the projected and expected results were not fully achieved¹⁴. Bulgaria is still facing challenges due to high influx of asylum seekers. This led to the decision to implement the (second) assistance package to Bulgaria (the SSP).

Identification of potential gaps and recommendations / suggestions

Lastly the participants provided comments on potential gaps and suggestions for improvement in EASO's mandate including:

- ▶ A permanent Bulgarian resident (i.e. a representative from EASO or from the Bulgarian asylum area) on the team aiding Bulgaria is required. This would allow for better monitoring and project consistency, and the chosen resident would know the language and the local context.
- ▶ Experts from MS aiding Bulgaria should ideally have some prior knowledge of the country and language, as some experts had no prior knowledge of the country and the language, thus creating language barrier.
- ▶ Since the skilled and trained MS personnel leave at the end of their term, creating instability, it is important to draw up preparatory and hand-over plans for when the expert leaves to ensure continuity.
- ▶ Additionally, it was suggested that EASO could help the government in improving the procedure and application of the ERF-AMIF funds. This will ensure optimal use of funds and elimination of duplication.
- ▶ Finally, it was argued that one of the gaps is that EASO is not getting feedback from civil society. It was recommended that EASO would be more open to dialogue with the various actors like NGOs and involve them in the report writing as their perception would point out issues that the Government might overlook.

¹⁴ EASO (2014), Final Evaluation, EASO Operating Plan to Bulgaria, (pg. 29)

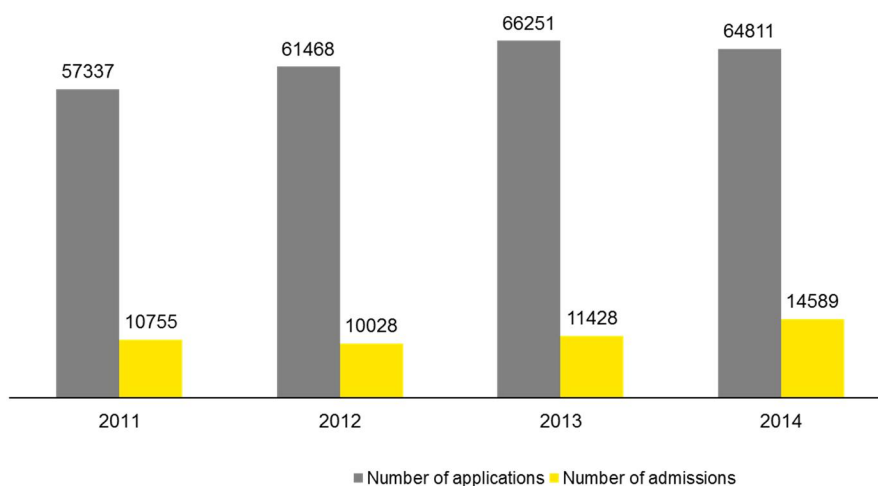
A3.2 France

The context: Asylum situation at national level

France ranks among the EU countries that receive most applications for asylum. It comes fourth after Germany, Sweden and Italy. The number of applications in France has remained stable between 2013 and 2014 (Figure 4).

Amongst these four countries, France is the country that has the highest rejection rate. In 2014, it only accepted around 22% of the requests while Germany accepted 42%, Italy 59% and Sweden 77%. However, it seems that the number of decisions to grant protection in the form of either refugee status or subsidiary protection is on the increase. The former has risen by nearly 30% between 2013 and 2014 (Figure 4). The latter has increased by more than 54% over the same period.

Figure 4: Number of applications and admissions in France over the evaluation period



(Source: OFPRA and CNDA)

The reform of the national asylum system

In 2003, a reform has established the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (OFPRA) as the only competent authority in charge of processing asylum applications. In 2007, the National Court for Asylum (CNDA) has become independent from the OFPRA.

During the 2012 campaign, President François Hollande made the vow to allow faster examination of asylum applications. That is the reason why the OFPRA has been undergoing an extensive reform for several months. Within a year, the average duration of processing was reduced from 214 to 204 days, thanks to a reform of the working practices and the recruitment of 25 officers.

The requirement to transpose the asylum package before July 2015 has provided the Government with the opportunity to reform the national asylum system through. A bill was drafted by the Ministry of the Interior in July 2014. The main objective of the bill is to build a system that would deter regular migrants from using the asylum protection, in order to better protect the rights of genuine asylum seekers. Accordingly, the OFPRA will be granted extended powers to process more effectively asylum

seekers applications and its independence will be established. Furthermore, the accommodation conditions will be improved, while the allocation of housing will be restricted.

In the context of the reform, a report of the French National Court of Auditors intended for the Government leaked in the French media. It indicated that the national system of asylum is overwhelmed by asylum applications and estimated that its cost amounts to 2 milliard euros. That has triggered a heated debate on the cost of the national asylum policy. Criticisms have multiplied against the latter, deemed too generous for asylum seekers. Consequently, the Senate is allegedly toughening the initial bill.

Interaction with EASO

French national stakeholders have a good knowledge of the working practices and the activities of EASO, especially in their own field of expertise.

A representative from the central services of the Ministry of the Interior attends Management Board meetings, along with a representative from the OFPRA, who is the alternate Management Board member for France. They both recognise the Management Board has achieved huge progress since its creation, specifically as far as preparatory work is concerned. Indeed, the quality of the documents provided has significantly increased, but they are often sent too late for the French representation to prepare properly. The OFPRA and the Ministry of the Interior need to reach an agreement before every Management Board meeting and they would appreciate if EASO could allow more time to prepare its Management Board meetings.

Aside from Management Board meetings, national stakeholders often interact with EASO. The OFPRA takes part in the drafting of EASO's annual reports on the situation of asylum and COI reports. It has also contributed to drafting COI reports, notably the report on Afghanistan security situation, issued in January 2015. Moreover, the OFPRA regularly provides statistics for the early preparedness system (EPS) and monthly trend analysis. Last, it has participated in debates organised by the European Commission on the transposition of latest European laws and in meetings of the EASO experts network on Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Russia and Syria. The CNDA also provides information for the annual report, as for instance an analysis of the legal changes that occurred in the French asylum system over the year.

The OFPRA is EASO's national contact point (NCP). On this account, it has deployed an agent from the Ministry of the Interior within the framework of EASO's 2014 support plan in Italy. It has also deployed experts of its own to the four workshops that took place in 2014. Furthermore, it has sent experts to practical cooperation workshops in January and March, on Iraq and joint processing of asylum applications in emergency situations respectively.

Moreover, national stakeholders participated in the elaboration of training modules. The OFPRA has been involved in the drafting of the EASO Training Curriculum (ETC). It has also taken part to the reform of the exclusion module and has supervised the translation in French of two training modules on vulnerable groups, thanks to European funding. The Ministry of Interior has also participated to the training of trainers. In order to later train new recruits, 5 staffs from the OFPRA have reached the status of trainer for the modules "Inclusion" and "Interview Techniques" thanks to EASO sessions organized in Brussels. 20 other employees from the OFPRA have reinforced their knowledge thanks to other modules¹⁵. Thanks to EASO's training, The OFPRA benefits from 12 European Asylum Curriculum (EAC) trainers that have trained half of the protection officers and the 55 new recruits that joined the organisation in January 2015.

¹⁵ "Exclusion Module" and "Interviewing Vulnerable Persons Module"

On the whole, collaboration between EASO and French asylum authorities is satisfactory. At the beginning, some judges might have been reluctant to EASO's action because they feared that the Agency would jeopardize their independence. But they have quickly changed their mind as they realised that common understanding and harmonisation were needed to implement the CEAS.

As regards NGOs, it seems that most of those manage the reception facilities are not involved in EASO's activities, except for Forum Réfugiés or AFDA which participate in the Consultative Forum. Forum Réfugiés has participated in 2011, 2012 and 2014 to the Consultative Forum. It has also answered to EASO's requests for information on several occasions and sent various expressions of interest.

Relevance of EASO activities

The Agency's missions and mandate are deemed clear by most French stakeholders. According to the latter, EASO is progressively developing the activities enshrined in its founding Regulation. It is now able to quickly organise quality support plans to help Member States subject to particular pressure on their national asylum systems.

However, some think that EASO should focus more on the core duties set out by its founding regulation. Since the resources allocated to the Agency are not likely to increase, EASO should limit the range of its activities to have an actual impact on the CEAS.

Effectiveness of EASO support to Member States

EASO is generally considered very reactive in emergency situations. The pragmatic approach of the Agency is also appreciated. National stakeholders deem that EASO has been able to take action effectively and mobilise enough resource regardless of its founding regulation. It has not only proved efficient in emergency situation but has also provided long-term support, notably in Greece and in Italy. However, France has not yet requested special or emergency support, though it has benefited from EASO's permanent activities, and in particular training. Consequently, the knowledge of national stakeholders about the specifics of EASO support is rather limited.

Impact of EASO on collaboration between Member States

French national stakeholders and NGO representatives recognise that EASO has allowed authorities responsible for national asylum systems in Europe to meet and exchange on a regular basis. EASO's Management Board and specialised meetings have created an opportunity to meet the relevant authorities in every Member State.

The quality of debates moderated by EASO is also appreciated, because much of the floor is left for stakeholders' expression. For instance, debates between Member States when drafting the annual report are very rich and interesting. This has enabled national stakeholders to learn about other Member States' national asylum systems and to consider problems to which they had never been confronted before, each Member State experimenting specific asylum situations. EASO has consequently fostered mutual knowledge and spontaneous cooperation on information and good practices.

EASO has also directly contributed to the development of cooperation between Member States by involving them in its activities. It has begun to coordinate Member States to obtain information and provide support to Member States through the deployment of experts and trainers. As mentioned above (see section Interaction with EASO), the OFRPA and the CNDA have been providing EASO

with information on a regular basis. The OFPRA has also deployed several experts to take part in EASO's activities.

However, cooperation could still be improved between Member States. Although protection rates are quite close, collaboration regarding COI must be enhanced to develop a common European analysis, according to French stakeholders. Likewise, the exchange of good practices needs to be actively developed to achieve the convergence of Member States' practices across the European Union.

Impact of EASO on the convergence of Member States practises

French stakeholders do not acknowledge any specific impact of EASO on the national asylum system. Most of them believe EASO has still to bring evidence of the results of its action. The majority of French stakeholders believe EASO has had no impact on the convergence of national law or jurisprudence. However, the work with representatives of the judiciary system has just begun and EASO will probably achieve results in this field later. Indeed, EASO may help judges to arbitrate in a dispute by providing relevant and precise information. For example, guidelines asking for judges not to send back asylum seekers to some countries because of the risks they might run there might be of use. EASO's information could also help the Courts justify their decisions in judgements.

Perception on EASO added-value

It is widely recognised amongst French stakeholders that EASO has added a lot of value. EASO's information, analysis and training are particularly appreciated by national authorities, because they are unique. NGO representatives also acknowledge EASO's expertise as far as information is concerned. No other organisation has been able to produce similar outputs.

EASO has achieved tremendous progress regarding the annual report on asylum. Latest reports perfectly met national stakeholders' expectations. Monthly reports on the state of asylum are also deemed valuable. On the whole, national stakeholders say that EASO provides strategic information and quality statistical analysis. This is all the more true since the French administration intends to make increasing use of monthly reports on the state of asylum.

In general, stakeholders are also very happy with EASO's training activities: the training material is flexible enough to be adapted to existing practices at the national level and the role of EASO in terms of training is deemed essential.

However, views do not concur on the added value of EASO to the French asylum system. Some French stakeholders feel they contribute more than they receive. They recognise that cooperation is useful, but they find that EASO has not significantly affected their work. On some very specific matters, such as training, EASO's work may be a good complement to their own, but it is not necessary because the French data collection, analysis and training are already very developed.

On the contrary, others believe that EASO brings data collection and analysis capacities that no administration alone would be able to achieve. Indeed, EASO's work meets strict quality and independence standards: it involves many sources, sticks to a rigorous methodology and its independence is guaranteed, which is crucial given the political sensitivity of asylum issues. Consequently, EASO's work adds a lot of value.

Perception of EASO's coordination with other existing organisation

Some French stakeholders are afraid that EASO's activities are overlapping with those of other organisations. EASO and EMN are covering similar actions, in particular as far as Diasporas studies are concerned. A risk of duplication is also identified between EASO and GDISC. Indeed, GDISC aims at being a network to "Initiate, co-ordinate and improve practical co-operation between Immigration Services responsible for the implementation of migration and asylum issues in Europe". It is also willing to be a platform for exchanging experiences, best practices and building up networks of experts. Consequently, EASO and GDISC are both designed to facilitate cooperation of Member States, specifically in the field of asylum.

French NGO representatives acknowledge EASO's efforts to involve the civil society. For instance, EASO has consulted NGOs after the publication of the annual report for two years. Moreover, EASO has agreed to hold the Consultative Forum in Brussels, which encourages NGOs to attend. However, they feel that their opinion is not really taken into account, while they could bring field-based information to EASO. They also wish EASO's external communication would be further developed. For instance, they would like to receive more information in anticipation of EASO's meetings.

A3.3 Germany

The context: Asylum situation at national level

Germany ranks first among the EU countries that receive most applications for asylum. In 2014, Germany processed 172,945 first-time applications, followed by Sweden (74,980), Italy (63,000), France (57,000) and the United Kingdom (31,070)¹⁶. Total number of applications accounted for about 32% of EU applications that year. In 2015, the number of new applications may amount to 400,000, according to the Internal Affairs Ministry; more than double the number in 2014.

In January 2014, the German regions that hosted most asylum seekers were North Rhine Westphalia, Baden Württemberg and Bavaria. These regions represented more than 49% of the total number of applications in Germany (Figure 5).

Figure 5: The distribution of asylum seekers across Germany's regions

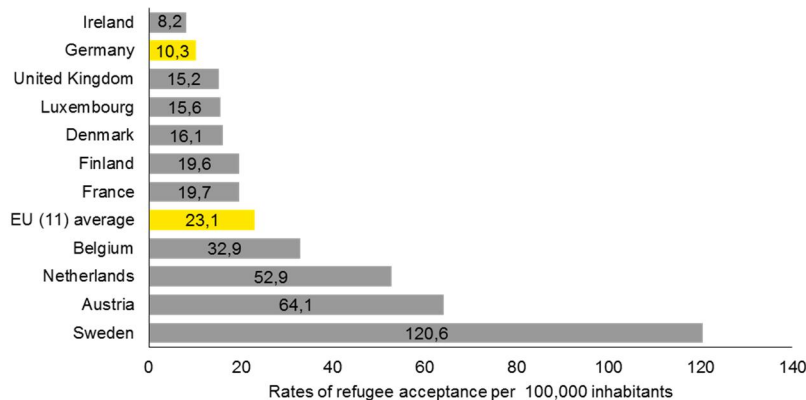
¹⁶ Eurostat



(Source: German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees)

Germany average annual acceptance of asylum seekers per 100,000 inhabitants is amongst the lowest of “EU 11” countries. Very few of those who apply are eventually granted the right to asylum. In 2014, it was only 1.6 percent. Counting those who are protected by the Geneva Convention and those who are permitted to remain temporarily for other reasons, about 30% of all asylum-seekers are allowed to stay in the country. The protection rate was precisely 29.7% in 2014.

Figure 6: Average annual acceptance of asylum seekers per 100,000 inhabitants in “EU11” countries (2005-12)



(Source: UNHCR)

National reform

The influx of refugees of the last few years has been causing problems in Germany, especially as far as housing is concerned. Refugees' access to food and healthcare is ensured, but the situation has generated tensions between national stakeholders. Cities have been demanding more money and

capacity to be able to provide adequate assistance to refugees. Reception centres lack of staff and financial resources as they need to expand. For instance, Hamburg had to increase the number of spaces in refugee processing centres from 70 to 1,700 in only three years.

In 2014, shocking images from a German asylum home have made Germans aware of the flaws in the system. This has led to heated debates, while the idea that refugees should be provided with protection in Germany is gaining popularity. As a result, negotiations are currently ongoing between Länders and the Federal State to determine the financial responsibility of each party as regards accommodation. An announcement will be made on June 18th to unveil the debate outcome.

Furthermore, after it was reported that a record number of asylum seekers was expected, political action on asylum law was necessary to protect asylum seekers. That is why the law made faster deportation to safe countries of origin possible. In 2013 and 2014, three western Balkan countries¹⁷ accounted for more than a sixth of the applications for asylum in Germany. The majority of applications filed by these countries' nationals were rejected because the applicants were considered economic migrants. In September 2014, the Bundesrat approved the Federal Government's draft legislation adding to the list of presumed safe countries of origin. Indeed, the law presumes that Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia are safe countries of origin without a threat of political persecution. This aims at reducing the number of asylum requests from those countries' nationals, even though the presumption of safety may be refuted in specific cases, which is not the case in practice, according to local NGOs.

In the face of the increased number of asylum applications, 300 new staff members have also been hired in BAMF in 2014. 350 more are expected in 2015, including decision-makers. 20 BAMF new branch offices have also been created: when there are more than 50 people in a reception centre, a branch is set out.

Interaction with EASO

Representatives from the Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI) attend Management Board meetings since these have been set in place. They consider that they have improved a lot since 2011. The agenda is now structured and Member State representatives' interventions are increasingly relevant.

There is also good cooperation between BAMF and EASO. Firstly, their representatives meet within the framework of GDISC and other international conferences. Secondly, one of the divisions of the BAMF is EASO's national contact point (NCP), and the BAMF representatives in Malta or in countries supported by EASO ensure there is good communication with the Agency. The BAMF has been involved in nearly all EASO's activities. It has taken part in 23 actions and supporting activities of EASO, notably in Bulgaria, Hungary, Greece, and Italy. It has also deployed 16 experts in the EASO activity pool. Furthermore, it has been involved in EASO's training activities: experts have taken part in nearly all modules of EASO but BAMF staffs have not been trained by EASO yet.

However, State representatives identify several factors that have made their cooperation with EASO difficult. Firstly, experts are sent for quite a while so it has been difficult for Germany to send as many experts as it was willing to, especially before the surge in staff the BAMF has known since 2014. Secondly, German experts do not always have the language skills required to participate in EASO's activities. If Germany is willing to contribute to EASO's activities, it appears it does not much benefit from EASO's support. Some consider Germany would neither ask for assistance nor be very open to receiving experts from other States because it is not in the national culture.

¹⁷ Serbia, Macedonia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina

As regards UNHCR, it seems that their most direct interaction with EASO is their collaboration to drafting the annual report, in which NGOs were also involved. They acknowledge that the relationship with EASO has been considerably strengthened in the last few years, partly thanks to the high level of commitment of EASO staff. For instance, UNHCR has been recently involved in training activities and experts from the UNHCR have also advised in the drafting of guidance for judges. UNHCR representatives state their organisation has struggled for some time to be recognized as a reliable source of information and expertise in Germany. Consequently they believe that EASO will eventually manage to get the credit it deserves from the German national administration, even though it may take time.

Relevance of EASO activities

There is a wide consensus amongst German stakeholders that the EU needs a specialised Agency on asylum matters. Consequently, EASO has helped to fill a gap in the EU institutional system.

Federal State's representatives consider the support provided by EASO to Member State is relevant to the implementation of the CEAS. Still, according to stakeholders from the civil society, EASO will only be able to foster the further development of the CEAS if they ensure a good level of independence. Some consider that EASO systematically favours Member States' opinion. Consequently, EASO is not critical enough of Member State Human Rights infringements. Especially, EASO does not seem willing to tackle older Member States' practices. For instance, asylum seekers detention conditions in Germany were not in accordance with EU law before the European Court of Justice ruled that third country citizens awaiting deportation must be detained separately from regular prisoners on July 17th 2014.

Some say that EASO might eventually be seen as an instrument used by Member States to legitimate their political decisions and influence debates across Europe with their own information. This suspicion might undermine EASO and ruin the very positive influence it is building otherwise. To offset this, EASO should involve more NGOs, but also academics and practitioners. NGOs representatives acknowledge that EASO has been willing to consult with them, but they wish their analyses would have been reflected in the final reports.

Another reason why it might be difficult for stakeholders to say if EASO's activities are relevant is the fact that EASO appears to lack of transparency. NGOs representatives consider difficult to have access information about the concrete impact EASO has produced. However, representatives from the German administration do not concur. They consider EASO transparent. Furthermore, they think that EASO is a structure funded by Member States that should defend their interest. Consequently, NGOs should be consulted, but they should not be able to yield influence in EASO.

Impact of EASO on collaboration between Member States

According to all stakeholders, EASO has spurred exchanges between authorities responsible for national asylum systems in the European Union. German State representatives say they discuss asylum trends prognosis with their counterparts from other Member States within the framework of EASO. Consequently, these meetings allow adopting concrete measures, even though the short format of Management Board meetings limits the depth of debates and exchanges.

Members from the German administration wish EASO were more active on resettlement issues. Germany is favourable to the implementation of a European policy on resettlement that could Syrian or Lebanese refugees could be accommodated in the European Union.

Perception on EASO added-value

It is widely recognised amongst German stakeholders that EASO has added a lot of value. EASO's COI, and the EPS system are much appreciated. Moreover, monthly trend analysis has helped to improve the working practices of the German administration, since it has allowed the BAMF to enhance its own prognosis tool. EASO's training is also much appreciated by the interviewed German administration representatives. EASO's curriculum is used at both national and federal levels and it has allowed the BAMF to complete its own training. On the whole, members of the German administration consider they are better prepared to face a sudden influx of asylum seekers thanks to the effort EASO has been putting to implement the CEAS.

However, some stakeholders point out that EASO should be very careful as regards the quality and independence of COI. If it is believed that the information provided by EASO is not good or is biased by Member States' political interests, Courts will not be willing to use it. Consequently, developing COI would be a pointless exercise.

Perception of EASO's coordination with other existing organisation

National stakeholders do not identify negative duplication of tasks between EASO and other organisation. They consider that AMIF's and EASO's activities are complimentary. The AMIF leads projects but organises no training. The nature of EASO's activities is different but both supports are complimentary.

They do not think either there is duplication with GDISC, as GDISC mostly deals with management questions such as making priorities or implementing change management, when EASO's agenda focuses on asylum quality.

Lastly, Good cooperation has also been developed between EASO and Frontex, once EASO had set in place its working structure. This is illustrated by the fact that a representative of Frontex participates in Management Board meetings.

Representatives from the German administration consider all the aforementioned organisations are complimentary. For instance, the BAMF cooperates with the IOM on matters that are not covered by EASO such as trafficking, vulnerable persons or Islam communities. They are also positive that having several organisations covering similar fields is largely beneficial. For example, the BAMF is happy to have analysis from EASO, UNHCR and IOM because each organisation has its own approach as it allows comparing different analysis.

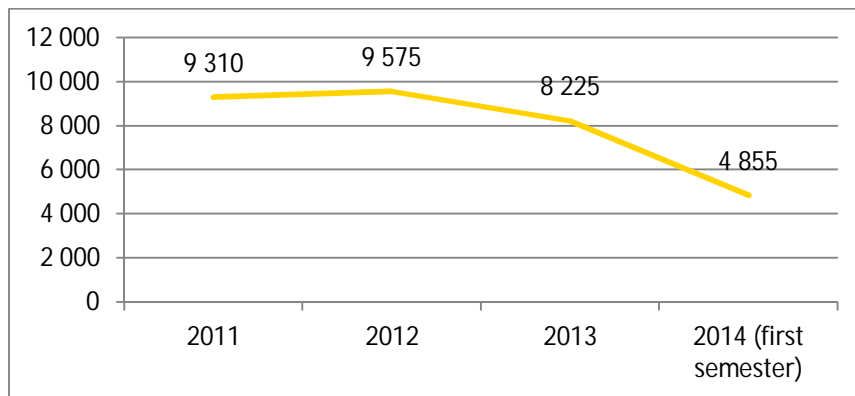
A3.4 Greece

The context: Asylum situation at national level

According to the 2013 Annual Report Situation of Asylum in the EU, in 2011 the total number of asylum applicants in Greece amounted to 9,310, in 2012 it rose to 9,575 and in 2013 it slumped to

8,825. According to EUROSTAT data¹⁸, during the first half of 2014, Greece received 4,855 asylum requests.

Figure 7: Number of asylum applicant in Greece



(Source: EASO Annual Report Situation of Asylum in the European Union 2013, EUROSTAT Issue number 11/2014)

The recognition rate in Greece is quite low comparing to the EU average. For instance, according to EASO 2013 Annual Report on Asylum, in 2013 Greece showed the lowest first instance recognition rate, with 4%¹⁹ of positive decisions, while most of the MS displayed an overall recognition rates between 20% and 46%.

National strategy / policy

Due to the high backlog of asylum cases at the appeal level and given the lack of a sustainable and efficient asylum and reception structure, Greece has been designing, reviewing and adjusting its immigration and asylum policy.

In October 2009 the Greek Government initiated a procedure of consultation within the competent state actors (e.g. Ministry of Citizen Protection, Ministry of Health, etc.) and other stakeholders (e.g. international organization, NGOs and the Athens Bar Association). The results of such consultation were consolidated in 2010 in the “Action Plan on Migration Management”, aimed at creating an efficient National Migration Flow Management System, including a complete recast of the asylum system. Hence, following the reform of the asylum system, the national authority was in need of assistance both at the level of guidance and technical know-how as well as at the level of operational support, and in such context EASO started its operations in 2011.

The following sections are based on the evidence gathered from the interviews with five key Greek stakeholders (MB member, representatives of national authorities, NGOs and international organization) and from the e-survey addressing EASO’s pool of expert and trainers deployed in Greece (sample of 11 respondents). According to the national authority, the Greek asylum strategy aims at building an effective, fair and just system of asylum claims awarding. The authorities

¹⁸ EUROSTAT, second quarter 2014 - Issue number 11/2014: Asylum applicants and first instance decisions on asylum applications

¹⁹ EASO Annual Report on the situation of Asylum in 2013. “This recognition rate aggregates decisions issued under both the previous asylum system and the new asylum system”, which came into operation on 7 June 2013. “Within 2013, the recognition has risen from below 1 % in the first semester 2013 (with the responsible authority being the Hellenic Police) to 15,4 % by the end of 2013 (with the responsible authority being the new Asylum Service). In April 2014, the recognition rate at first instance stood at 19 %”.

interviewed argued that, to achieve such objective, the country should build up and expand the current asylum authority - which is rather understaffed – put additional efforts in clearing the backlog linked to the period before June 2013 and further improve the new asylum system.

A relevant NGO explained that since 2011 national activities are focused on the transition from the old to the new asylum procedure adding that, for the future, the national strategy should focus on the establishment of new regional asylum offices as well as on providing access to the fast track procedures for Syrian refugees.

Interaction with EASO

During the evaluation period, Greece has benefited of EASO's permanent and emergency support. With regard to the latter, in order to enhance and build capacity of Greek national authorities, EASO supported Greece in establishing the new Asylum Service, the First Reception Service, the Appeal Authority, as well as in managing reception and reducing the backlog of asylum cases. The first phase of the Operating plan (OP I) was signed on 1 April 2011 to support the implementation of the Action Plan on Asylum and Management of Migration and was in effect until 31 March 2013. On 7th March 2013, EASO and the Greek Government signed an agreement on the extension of EASO support to Greece until December 2014 (OP II). Overall, EASO deployed 79 ASTs made up of experts from 14 MS.

Concerning the definition of the Operating plan, the national authority stated that EASO agreed to provide support for every request issued by the Greek administration adding that, although negotiations were rather long, the plan definition process was managed effectively by the Agency. On the contrary, a relevant international organisation argued that, in few occasions, EASO could not respond to all beneficiary's requests and that some measures foreseen in the Operating plans were delayed due to temporary unavailability of national experts.

Overall, national stakeholders acknowledged EASO and the services provided by the Agency, particularly in the field of training, COI, and development of quality tools for procedural convergence at the EU level. In particular, when referring to EASO activities, the national authority argued that the most important support received by the Agency regards training of members of the asylum service, of the appeals authority -although to a lesser extent- and of people working in reception centres. The authority interviewed also recognised the importance of EASO's support in the area of quality assurance and COI - including the portal - and upheld that networks have indirectly improved the functioning of the Greek asylum service, adding that – considering EASO's limited budget - the Agency should continue focusing on such activities rather than on third country support. The same position was held by a local NGO interviewed, which argued that EASO's basic purpose regards the provision of technical support (e.g. training, support to the applicant backlog committee for interpretation activities) and expertise in order to implement the CEAS, overlooking the Agency's activities with regard to third country support and information and analysis.

Concerning EASO's communication strategy, national authorities argued that the internal communication between Greece and the Agency has always been very effective, continuous and valuable. Nonetheless, the interviewees added that, at national level EASO has gained some visibility mainly due to the support provided to the Greek administration, while it is not very well known by the public opinion. In this regard, a relevant international organisation argued that, even if over the evaluation period EASO has improved its communication strategy, it does not seem to be very open to non-State actors (e.g. NGOs, individual experts who are not MS's officials, etc.).

Relevance of EASO activities

Most of the interviewees agreed that EASO's activities are consistent with national needs and objectives in the field of asylum and that, to some extent, the Agency has supported the Greek administration in conducting the needs assessment.

As a matter of fact, the national authority explained that there was no need at the national level which could not be covered by EASO's mandate, adding that in the very initial phase of the operational support, the Agency has deployed ASTs in charge of analyzing what was needed for the Asylum Service and consequently drafted the support measures.

Nevertheless, some interviewees argued that emergency support provided by EASO risks to be jeopardized by the complexity of the Greek asylum context adding that, as a priority, national authorities need more staff and more resources to efficiently work in the field. According to the same interviewees, given that the Agency cannot offer such resources to the beneficiary, probably Greece will not be able to achieve its national objectives relying only on the emergency support provided by EASO.

Effectiveness of EASO support for the MS

Overall, national stakeholders defined EASO's permanent and special support in terms of usefulness and timeliness as rather good, although expressing diverging opinions on some particular aspects of the Agency activities, as explained in the following paragraphs.

Concerning information and analysis support, most of the interviewees appreciate EASO's activities in this field. In particular, a representative of the Greek administration argued that they mainly use the information provided by the Agency on field, for instance for the identification of applicants, unaccompanied minors as well as for age assessment procedures.

With regards to EASO training, national authorities argued that such activity was absolutely crucial, pointing out that EASO has supported the Greek administration in achieving goals regarding unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable groups. In addition, Greek Authorities have tried to be as present as possible in all EASO activities, and that, as a whole, they found training activities very useful. As far as COI and quality activities are concerned, most interviewees agreed that COI activities and COI experts networks have represented a valid support provided by the Agency, with the national authority arguing that Greek officials have access to COI portal and consult it on a regular basis, adding that COI documents are used by case workers and decision makers in Greece. Moreover, the national authority explained that EASO's quality mapping and thematic reports are used quite frequently by the administration and that such tools have been used to identify few needs at the national level as well as to correctly transpose the EU legislation into the national law. In this respect, civil society representatives also upheld that MS capacity has significantly improved thanks to quality assurance activities carried out by the Agency.

Commenting on EASO's operational support, national authorities argued that within the implementation of the support plans the Agency was on average effective and flexible. Nevertheless, some representatives of the Greek administration stressed that during the first operating plan not every national expert deployed by EASO had an in-depth knowledge of the Greek asylum situation adding that, in some cases, experts organized and proposed actions without consulting MS beneficiary. As a whole, the second and third support plans have been more appreciated by the Greek administration because of their level of detail and their pragmatic and specific approaches. According

to a relevant NGO interviewed, EASO's support has been very significant in terms of backlog clearance, identification of inactive cases and definition of some standard operating procedures regarding data gathering on asylum applicants. From the experts' point of view, support activities were mainly hindered by language barriers, lack of staff and motivation within the Greek administration as well as by an insufficient coordination between different departments within the beneficiary organization. In this respect, most of the experts deployed in Greece (OP I and/or OP II) argued that over years EASO officials could have put in place some corrective measures, including a better organization of experts deployment (e.g. inform experts in advance on activities carried out during the support plan, increase the budget for interpreters and translators, plan monthly meeting with all relevant stakeholders).

Nonetheless, it has been argued that the effectiveness of EASO's operating plan was partially hindered by the fact that, for the first two years of OP I, the Greek administration was not able to comprehensively assess all its needs and communicate them to the Agency.

Identification of EASO impact on national asylum matters, on practical cooperation between the MS and other EU MS

The majority of national stakeholders sustain that thanks to EASO, Greece has achieved its medium and long term changes in the field of asylum. In particular, the national authority argued that the Agency improved significantly the achievements and activities linked to the implementation of the CEAS, which was substantially overlooked before EASO intervention. With regard to improvements in the reception system, a representative of the Greek administration argued that, since Greece is in the process of transposing directives in the national legislation, it is difficult to understand the impact of such activities. Indeed, during the OP II, in 2014 Greece has significantly improved its reform of the asylum system, whereas in the first phase of the operating plan, the boost of EASO's deployment had a very limited impact on the national asylum system. Still, further effort is required from the Greek administration for the achievement of its long-term objectives, which depend on several factors (e.g. the scarce number of civil servants employed in the Asylum service), that lie beyond EASO's scope of action.

As far as the data collection system is concerned, a representative of the national asylum service argued that thanks to the Agency support, the statistics produced are reliable and give an accurate picture of the asylum situation month by month and year by year. Moreover, the Agency's demands represent a motivation for the Greek administration to set up a system that produces reliable statistics. Conversely, others maintain that relying on the data collected by the Greek Authorities, instead of producing its own statistical analysis, represents a limit for the Agency.

Concerning the impact of training activities at the national level, Greek stakeholders – including NGO representatives - argued that overall, training materials provided by EASO have been used also beyond training courses. In particular, the national authority explained that local stakeholders use almost exclusively such materials and that EASO has proved to be very reactive in developing new modules according to the MS needs. Nevertheless, a shortcoming raised by the interviews is that, although training materials have been translated into Greek, training sessions very rarely were held in the local language. Divergent opinions emerged regarding the impact of EASO training activities on the national jurisprudence. On the one hand, the national authority estimated that, since most civil servants are well aware of the EASO training curriculum, and a significant number has actually been trained, this must have certainly influenced the pattern of the decisions at second instance. On the other hand, others point out that, given the slowness of the Greek national jurisprudence, EASO cannot impact at all on the Greek system.

According to the national authority, EASO improved practical cooperation with other MS in the field of asylum and reception, for example by enhancing closer relations with civil servants working on COI in Poland or Switzerland. Moreover, the Greek administration acknowledged the role of the Agency in fostering their cooperation with IGC (Inter-Governmental Consultation) on asylum and migration.

Perception on EASO added-Value

As a whole, national stakeholders presented some diverging opinions with regard to EASO's added value. According to the national authority, EASO provided a very tangible added value at the EU level thanks to training, COI and resettlement activities which enhanced also intra-EU solidarity. Moreover, the administration explained that the Agency has moved from being an "assembly of experts from different MS" to an interstate Agency bringing a common European culture.

Several interviewees stressed that EASO's role was particularly pivotal in providing expertise for the management of ERF, thereby leveraging the effectiveness of all instruments financed by DG Home in the country. None of the interviewee has identified any duplication between the Agency and EU funds.

Concerning the cooperation with other EU and international bodies, most interviewees acknowledged that there are good synergies between the Agency and UNHCR. In particular, one relevant NGO interviewed recognized that EASO cooperation with UNHCR has been very efficient and effective, leading to a substantial reduction of the applicant backlog. On the other hand, few respondents had a clear picture of EASO's cooperation with Frontex and of the existence of activities jointly undertaken by the Agencies.

Finally, a representative of the asylum service stated that EASO can provide a limited added value in the management of asylum influxes and that the Agency's ability to provide operational support to MSs in this field is overestimated.

Identification of potential gaps and suggestion

Overall, the following gaps and suggestions emerged from the interviews with national stakeholders and experts deployed:

- ▶ EASO's role could be reviewed and enlarged, increasing the possibility of EASO's support on the ground both to MS in emergency situation and to MS which are not under particular migratory pressures.
- ▶ EASO could draw from the expertise, availability and knowledge of experts who are not necessarily MS officials.
- ▶ EASO should improve its interpretation services, for instance introducing a code of conduct for interpreters working in the asylum procedure in all MS, or adopting new common guidelines for the provision of interpretation services or providing minimum training to interpreters.
- ▶ EASO's communication strategy should be further enhanced in order to reach the public opinion and widen the knowledge of the Agency support also beyond the MS beneficiary's administration
- ▶ EASO could be more proactive in the definition of the support plan, especially in those cases where the MS beneficiary has a weak administrative apparatus (e.g. civil servants do not speak English fluently or are not very familiar with working with Agencies).

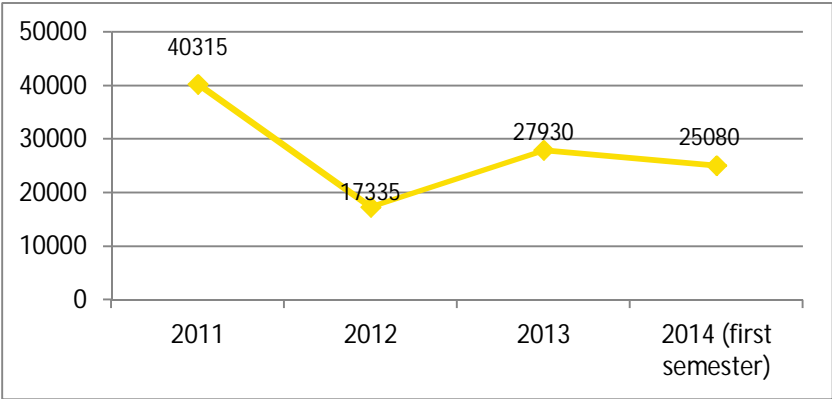
EASO support could be enhanced thanks to a better preparation for experts to be deployed with specific regard to MS beneficiary's legal context and internal situation. In other words, when intervening in emergency situations, EASO should adopt a more flexible and tailor-made approach and conduct an in-depth assessment of the asylum context in which it is going to operate.

A3.5 Italy

The context: Asylum situation at national level

Due to its position as entry point to Europe for third country nationals, Italy is among those EU MS which faced increased migratory pressure over the last years. Such pressure results in a large numbers of arrivals off the south coasts of the country (62,692 in 2011 up to more than double in 2014, 170,100). According to the 2013 Annual Report Situation of Asylum in the EU, in 2011 the total number of asylum applicants in Italy amounted to 40,315, in 2012 it slumped to 17,335 (-57% compared to previous year) and rose to 27,930 in 2013 (+61% compared to 2012). According to EUROSTAT DATA, during the first half of 2014, Italy received more than 25,000 asylum requests, a number equal to the total filed in all of 2013.

Figure 8: Number of asylum applicants in Italy within the evaluation period



Over the evaluation period, the need to review the Italian national asylum and migration policy was at the centre of the public debate, in particular following the tragic events that occurred in October 2013 in Lampedusa.

The following sections are based on the evidence gathered from the interviews with seven key Italian stakeholders (MB member, representatives of national authorities, academia and associations) and from the e-survey addressing EASO's pool of expert and trainers deployed in Italy (sample of 13 respondents) and other national stakeholders (sample of 3 respondents).

National strategy / policy

From the national authority point of view, due to the persistent migratory pressure, the Italian asylum strategy has been moving towards the strengthening of the whole reception system, starting from the landing site and from the improvement in the procedures for the immediate and effective identification of migrants.

As regards to the reception capacity, the second level of reception within the Italian System for the Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR)²⁰ has been extended from 3,000 places for the 2011-2013 period up to 16,000 places for the 2014- 2016 period. In addition to primary care services, the SPRAR system promotes the integration of migrants through a series of services aiming at the socio-economic integration of third country nationals. Moreover, in order to facilitate the integration of migrants who leave the SPRAR, a programme that involves the Ministry of Labour has been set up by Asylum Authority.

In order to cope effectively with significant volume of cases and pending cases, several measures have been put in place to reinforce the competent bodies (territorial commissions) that manage the procedure for the recognition of International protection.

According to the interviewed stakeholders, although Italy is still seeking its own Asylum strategy, significant progress have been made over the past years and, If compared with the past, the country has demonstrated to be open to change. Moreover, Italy is harmonizing its asylum procedures, both on the quantitative side (number of authorities) and qualitative side, improving the awareness of the professionals involved in the asylum sector. As a whole, many changes are under way. At the end of 2015, the asylum system is expected to be designed in a more effective way in order to significantly increase its capacity to face the challenges arising from the steady increase of migrant arrivals off the national coasts.

Interaction with EASO

During the evaluation period, Italy has benefited of EASO permanent and special support. More specifically, following the request submitted by the Italian authorities on 7 December 2012, the first EASO Special Support Plan to Italy was signed on 4th June 2013 by the Executive Director of EASO and the Head of the Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration within the Italian Ministry of Interior. A first amendment to the EASO Special Support Plan to Italy introducing two additional measures was signed in September 2013, while a second amendment has been agreed and signed at the end of March 2014.

The objectives of the Special support plan implemented by EASO in Italy has been to improve and enhance the Italian asylum and reception system, to align such system with the recast EU asylum package and support Italy on COI, on the reinforcement of the Dublin system, on operational procedures for the emergency capacity and on further support for appeal instances.

The special support plan foresaw the implementation of 45 activities (including an expert team on evaluation of SSP) over 218 calendar days (from June 2013 to December 2014) and under 9 main measures: data collection and analytical capacity; country of origin information (COI) capacity; Dublin unit – capacity building; reception system; emergency capacity; independent training of the Italian school for the judiciary; training in interview techniques; professional development seminar and study visits for the senior management; final evaluation of the implementation of the special support plan. Such activities have been addressed to a variety of stakeholders, such as: the Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration – Central Directorate of Services for Immigration and Asylum; the Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration – Central Directorate of Policies for Immigration and Asylum; Department of Public Security – Central Directorate of Immigration and Border Police; National Asylum Commission; Territorial Commissions for the recognition of the International

²⁰ The Italian reception system is characterized by two levels of reception: a first level of reception occurs in the governative reception centres for asylum seekers (CARA), while a second level occurs in SPRAR centers

protection; Border Police, Police HQ, Prefectures; High School of Ministry of Interior; Italian School for the Judiciary; Civil judges and justices of the peace.

Overall, national stakeholders acknowledge EASO and its mission and, when referring to the Agency, they recognize the role of EASO in support activities to MS and for the implementation of the CEAS. However, it could be argued that, most of the time, interviewee's knowledge of EASO's activities is linked to the type of support they have directly benefited of or which is closer to their area of work, while they don't know exactly and into details all the type of activities provided by the Agency. For example, EASO's main mission is perceived as related to the development of a common EU training and COI system and to the promotion of coordination and cooperation measures among EU MS, while, with the exception of the national authority, there is not a adequate awareness of all the activities in which EASO is involved.

The majority of national stakeholders interviewed is aware of the Agency's support provided to Italy, above all training activities. However, for most of them the Agency is not enough visible at the national level and should improve its communication strategy in order to reach a larger public, including more non-governmental organizations. More generally, EASO's action is perceived only in case of emergency support, thus showing a limited understanding of the Agency's role, for instance in the identification and pooling of best practices.

The EASO infoday organized in June 2014 has been perceived as a good initiative and registered a rather high stakeholders' participation. Participants stated that the exchange of views with the EASO Communication Officer was particularly constructive. On this occasion, several national public administrations (e.g. representative from other Ministries) showed particular interest toward EASO activities and had the chance to learn more about EASO support to Italy.

Relevance of EASO activities

As a whole, most part of national stakeholders perceived EASO's activities as consistent with the needs of the country, above all in the training field. Furthermore, according to the evidence gathered EASO is considered to play an enormous role in improving the Italian asylum system and enhancing the professionalism of the operators, especially for case workers.

The Agency's willingness to extend the training activities to the judges as well as the possibility to compare Italian practice and case law with the European ones was particularly appreciated.

EASO is mainly perceived as proactive and able to identify and address MS needs, even if it has emerged that the Agency's activities do not cover completely all national needs because the Agency' is considered at an earlier stage of its action while it's expected to develop a complete support services in the upcoming years. The "joint processing" has been mentioned as a strategic goal for the future that hasn't yet been fully developed by EASO.

Effectiveness of EASO support for the MS

As already mentioned Italy has benefited of permanent and special support activities. Among them EASO's training is overall considered as useful and of high quality. In particular, the training activities are perceived as concrete with a relevant impact on the improvement of the quality of the Asylum system. In fact, the input coming from EASO has brought about a widening of administration's expertise and a substantial improvement of the quality of their work. However, an Italian translation of all EASO products has been suggested by the representatives of national authority.

The representative of the Academia particularly appreciated the involvement of other MS, EU stakeholders and external operators such as academics in the development of the training modules.

With regard to quality and training activities provided by the Agency to national stakeholder, members of the national authorities reported a very positive feedback from those who benefited of it, in particular as regards to the interactive training methodology adopted by the Agency that provides online session and a classroom session to all participants.

However, some improvements and suggestions regarding EASO's training and COI activities, have emerged both from interviews and e-survey by the e-survey, which can be summarized as follows:

- ▶ Broaden the target of training activities, including more civil servants, judges, interpreters and social workers (especially in the reception and accommodation system) as they have very important roles in the procedure;
- ▶ Make the timeframe for the e-learning modules more flexible and tailored to individual needs (e.g. allowing 6 weeks for the e-learning);
- ▶ Foster the training on COI and strengthen the Italian capacity in this field; make the COI portal more accessible.

Concerning the special support, the overall perception gathered through the interviews is that the plan worked out well and that stakeholders have positive feedbacks. In particular, the national asylum authority felt fully involved in the drafting of the plan from the very beginning, with roles and responsibilities being clearly identified. EASO is considered as a valid partner, able to adapt its activities to MS needs, even if some rigidities have been identified in the procedures for the approval of the two amendments to the plan.

According to a relevant national stakeholder, the experts deployed were very competent even if for some aspects, such as the Dublin Regulation, they did not demonstrate an in-depth knowledge of the Italian situation. Hence, the experts' approach was perceived as rather theoretical and slightly abstract.

The overall perception is that expected results within the support plan were achieved, but some minor dissatisfaction emerged with regard to the improvement of procedures after the disembarkation. Indeed, despite the Agency's identification of the system weaknesses and the consequent proposal of new tools, more could be done at the national level, such as an action plan following the proposal made by EASO to improve the national system. A common and relevant issue which emerged from interviews is the sustainability of EASO's intervention at national level. In this regard, the representatives of national authorities expressed the need of a follow-up/ audit mission to monitor the implementation of the suggested improvements after the plan. Overall, the average perception concerning the usefulness of EASO support in relation to national needs is rather high, and the same applies for the timeliness of EASO support in relation to national needs.

Identification of EASO impact on national asylum matters, on practical cooperation between the MS and other EU MS

Overall EASO's scientific and technical assistance is perceived as highly qualified. Among EASO products COI handbook, asylum trend reports and training materials are frequently used by all the stakeholders and are considered as particularly relevant at national level. Training materials are also used beyond EASO's courses as a guide for the daily work of professionals.

Overall, the statistical analysis and trends produced by EASO are perceived as accurate, clear and of great quality even if for the representative of the association their scientific value is rather limited because they are never accompanied by comments or recommendations and they don't affect directly the decision making process.

As regards to the impact of EASO activities for the improvement of practical cooperation between MS, most interviewees feel that EASO's activities are a fundamental driver for the cooperation among MS, which has been improved after the creation of EASO. The Agency is considered to have a key role for the exchange of experiences by introducing the cooperation at operational level and enhancing a greater communication between operators and experts in the asylum sector.

Moreover, MB members considered that EASO has strikingly enhanced and affected the MS propensity to intra-EU solidarity, mainly through the EUREMA project, regarding intra EU relocation, but something still needs to be done in order to ensure an effective solidarity and responsibility sharing between MS and to reach convergence with the EU jurisprudence.

The perception of the majority of interviewees on the Agency's contribution to the implementation of the CEAS is positive and for some of them the support provided is excellent, because of its operational rather than theoretical value. Moreover, according to the representatives of national authority, EASO has contributed to the implementation of the new asylum package in Italy by providing a series of recommendations and training with respect to the application of the new Dublin Regulation III. Nonetheless, EASO's support with respect to this activity is not entirely satisfactory, due to the rather theoretical approach adopted by the experts, which, in some cases, is not sufficiently tailored to the national situation.

Finally, as regards to the improvements generated by EASO at the national level, the average perception is rather low, because there has not been an action plan following the support and the recommendations provided by EASO, thus a direct impact on the national asylum system didn't take place.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS E-SURVEY CONCERNING EASO IMPACT ON ASYLUM MATTERS AND PRACTICAL COOPERATION

IMPACT FROM PARTICIPATION TO MEETINGS ON DAILY WORK

- ▶ The results of EASO meetings (thematic meeting/ practical cooperation meeting/ NCP meetings) impact on my daily work. I have to coordinate my statistic collection with EASO or Common EU standards
- ▶ I have gained valuable information and positive experiences

IMPACTS FROM TRAINING ACTIVITIES ON DAILY WORK

- ▶ Not very much for my work on statistics, but very useful for my colleagues!
- ▶ On gathering information and experience. I feel more confident in doing my work

IMPACT FROM SPECIAL SUPPORT ACTIVITIES

- ▶ A better management and coordination of all the Italian statistic stakeholders on asylum
- ▶ I have improved my skills

IMPACT FROM INFORMATION AND ANALYSIS SUPPORT ACTIVITIES

- ▶ An European panorama on the asylum
- ▶ They made my work more accurate
- ▶ More attention to the statistic and monthly publication in the Italian MoI website and more coordination between the different database stakeholders

IMPACT ON PRACTICAL COOPERATION WITH OTHER MS

- ▶ EASO increased the knowledge of other colleagues with similar or different needs
- ▶ As far as my work activity is concerned I have had so far a few information exchanges with colleagues of other MS in the field of COI proving helpful in solving some practical challenges or guiding me to the right decision.

Perception on EASO added-Value

Overall, the perceived added value of EASO's contribution mainly lies on the creation of a common culture among the professionals of the asylum field, based on information and data sharing and on the homogenisation of their expertise. Moreover, EASO contributes to deepen the knowledge of the European system at national level, to improve the European data collection system and to a remarkable increase of cooperation among MS at the operational level.

For the representative of the national authorities the programmes and projects co-financed by DG Home Affairs at national level are coherent and complementary with EASO's activities in the country. More specifically, the AMIF national programme 2014- 2020 has been drafted taking into account EASO's support in the training of the Territorial Commission involved in the examination of asylum procedure, as well as the measures foreseen for the improvement in the field of COI.

Another key point concerning EASO's added value is that experts on asylum in European countries have been pooled together to work on common issues. Such collaborations enhance the sharing of best practices and boost relationships among MS.

Moreover, the level of cooperation and synergy between EASO and other EU Agency and IOs is considered as excellent by the representatives of the national authorities and a further involvement of UNHCR on data analysis is suggested within the EPS. Moreover, according to them there is no risk of duplication and there is a good synergy and complementarity with other agencies.

Identification of potential gaps and suggestions

Overall, the following gaps and suggestions emerged from the interviews with national stakeholders:

- ▶ EASO should invest on third country support and on the external dimension of CEAS, an activity that was less developed in the early years of the Agency and that by now, given the relevant role of EASO in promoting resettlement at the European level, should become an Agency priority. In this regard, the participation in Euromed is definitely an important step because it is not limited to regional protection programmes, but involves also all the countries bordering the Mediterranean;
- ▶ The Agency must further develop its early warning system, due to the unpredictability of asylum flows. At the moment, considering the complexity of Italian migratory scenario, EASO's

support seems to be not sufficient to effectively prepare MS when facing asylum influxes. Analytical trends and statistics are not enough to predict influx, especially for a country as Italy (transit and entry country). A preventive analysis on countries of origin would be needed to "prevent and predict" high influx and to better prepare countries that host thousands of migrants. In this regard, EASO should also make greater use of the expertise of UNHCR. The early warning and preparedness system is at its early stage, a lot can yet be done and the efforts will be surely evident in the medium - long term;

- ▶ EASO should further contribute to the European policy making, for example in the negotiation of legal instruments in the European asylum law with the aim of harmonizing common EU asylum policies. The Agency should also mature its know-how in order to improve policy-making in the asylum field and to orient more vigorously the policies of the EU asylum system;
- ▶ EASO should further involve associations and NGOs at national level in its activities, for examples through the organization of national conferences or special training session, because they felt excluded by EASO activities in MS with an impact on the credibility of the Agency;
- ▶ The Agency should deepen its knowledge as regards to national contexts, by boosting its collaboration with national authorities, working more closely with the officials and participating more often to national conferences and debates.