



European Asylum Support Office

EASO annual activity report 2012

Part I

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European Asylum Support Office

EASO annual activity report 2012

Part I

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1. EASO's achievements

The year 2012 was the first full operational year for the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), and also the year in which it was granted financial independence. The number of staff increased from 18 to 58 during the year, and the budget stood at EUR 10 million.

EASO's mission is to organise and coordinate operational cooperation and to provide support in the area of asylum. EASO contributes to the development of a Common European Asylum System (CEAS) by facilitating, coordinating and strengthening practical cooperation among Member States as an independent centre of expertise. In this annual activity report, EASO reports on its achievements in 2012 concerning the implementation of its work programme, 2012 budget and establishment plan/multiannual staff policy plan, as well as its management and internal control systems.

Following the roadmap on the follow-up to the common approach on EU decentralised agencies, EASO is committed to streamlining the different reporting obligations into one single annual activity report.

The EASO annual activity report is produced in accordance with Article 29(1)(c) of Regulation (EU) No 439/2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 May 2010 establishing a European Asylum Support Office (the EASO regulation). The Management Board adopted the EASO annual activity report for 2012 on 3 June 2013. The final annual accounts, as contained in Annex 5.5, were approved by the Management Board on 13 June. EASO has sent this annual activity report to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Commission and the European Court of Auditors, as well as to the Internal Audit Service. This report is available in all official languages of the institutions of the European Union in accordance with Article 41(2) of the EASO regulation.

The achievements of EASO's operations in 2012 are explained in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 describes the EASO management structure, organisation and system of internal control. EASO has adopted the European Commission's 16 internal control standards by analogy. The progress on the implementation of the standards is given in detail. Moreover, a state of play is provided on the implementation by EASO of the roadmap on the follow-up to the common approach on EU decentralised agencies. Chapter 3 gives the building blocks on the assessment of EASO's report in order for the Executive Director to give his declaration of assurance. Chapter 4 concludes the annual activity report with the Declaration of Assurance.

Part II of EASO's annual activity report contains the annexes: EASO's progress report for 2012, its implementation of the relevant parts of the Stockholm programme, a list of publications in 2012, a report on access to documents, EASO's final annual accounts, a list of exceptional negotiated procedures and the self-assessment on the implementation of the roadmap on the follow-up to the common approach on EU decentralised agencies.

1.1. Relevant developments in 2012

First and foremost, significant developments took place concerning the new asylum package in the course of 2012. These developments had a direct impact on EASO's work, since one of its core tasks is to contribute to the implementation of the CEAS and thus support the application of the EU asylum legal instruments. In this regard, while the qualification directive was adopted in December 2011, negotiations were ongoing during 2012 on the Dublin regulation, the reception conditions directive, the asylum procedures directive and the Eurodac regulation. The new asylum package, to be fully adopted by summer 2013, will have a major impact on the planning and implementation of EASO's activities in 2013 and the following years.

Furthermore, the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council conclusions of 8 March 2012 have given a clear role to EASO in the Early Warning, Preparedness and Crisis Management Mechanism of Article 33 of the Dublin III Regulation. In response, EASO immediately dedicated resources to its Early warning and Preparedness System (EPS). In the meantime, in 2012, EASO was still building its basic structures and setting up the organisation with regard to recruitment, internal procedures, final premises and financial independence. Moreover, the Budgetary Authority

adopted a budget of EUR 10 million for 2012 as previously foreseen, instead of the EUR 12 million requested by EASO, as well as a reduction of EUR 2 million in the 2013 EASO budget and a reduction of staff by seven posts.

1.2. EASO's priorities in 2012

In 2012, EASO focused on the following three priorities:

1. fulfilling the operating plan for Greece;
2. further developing EASO's work on training, Country of Origin Information (COI), quality and the interpreters' pool;
3. building the organisation of EASO.

EASO's priorities were defined in its work programme for 2012. The work programme explicitly mentioned that, due to changing conditions in the asylum situation in the EU, the implementation of EASO activities might shift. EASO activities were slightly redefined. The following are a few examples.

- Special support has been introduced, as part of EASO's support measures. Special support is defined as tailor-made assistance, capacity building, relocation, specific support and special quality-control processes.
- The importance of information and analysis has increased. The name of the EASO Early Warning Mechanism was changed to the EASO Early warning and Preparedness System (EPS), following discussions with the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission.
- Due to limitations in the budget and human resources, the EASO action plan on the external dimension was postponed to 2013.

The goals set out in the 2012 work programme have been achieved.

1. Permanent support

- (a) EASO training: further develop the training curriculum and training material in coherence with the EASO training strategy, which was adopted in July 2012. Further develop the training expert pool and carry out EASO tasks on training activities.
- (b) Quality: further develop EU activities on quality assessment and quality mechanisms in asylum procedures.
- (c) Country of Origin Information (COI): further develop the COI portal, including defining methodology, setting up a standardised content determination procedure, publishing two COI reports on Afghanistan and organising COI workshops and a conference.
- (d) Interpreters' pool: transform the practices of the interpreters' pool into the list of available languages.
- (e) Unaccompanied minors (UMs): start information sharing and stimulate Member States to share their best practices on UMs and age assessment, as well as starting work on family tracing.

2. Special support

- (a) Tailor-made support and capacity building in Sweden.
- (b) Report on the intra-EU relocation measures, organise exchange of information and best practices and define methodologies and tools for EASO's support for intra-EU relocation.

3. Emergency support

- (a) Further develop the Asylum Intervention Pool (AIP), increasing its flexibility with up to 20 profiles.
- (b) Deploy Asylum Support Teams (ASTs) in Greece in line with the EASO operating plan and its amendments for Greece. Deploy ASTs in Luxembourg in line with the EASO operating plan for Luxembourg.
- (c) Prepare for future emergency support by developing methodologies and best practices for support operations.

4. Information and analysis support

- (a) Publish the EASO annual report for 2011 in July 2012.
- (b) Set up the first phase of the Early warning and Preparedness System.

5. Third country support

- (a) Organise exchange of information and best practices, and define methodologies and tools for the European coordinating dimension of resettlement via the resettlement conference in October 2012.
- (b) First preliminary EASO actions on the external dimension.

6. EASO organisation

- (a) Organised four Management Board meetings in 2012.
- (b) Moved to the EASO definitive premises in Valletta Harbour in September 2012.
- (c) Developed and finalised the EASO communication strategy, which was adopted in September 2012.
- (d) Established strong cooperation relations with EASO's partners and stakeholders, including the signature of the working arrangement with Frontex.
- (e) Develop fully the Consultative Forum, including tools for consultation.

1.3. The difference EASO makes

EASO's key performance indicator, which will be used for the work programme in 2014 and beyond, is the need expressed for EASO support and activities and the satisfaction with the support provided in assisting Member States in implementing the CEAS. In this annual activity report for 2012, EASO already gives an indication of its performance, based on this overall indicator.

EASO's work has had a real impact on the different levels on the implementation of the CEAS in the European Union. EASO's activities can be summarised under five principal headings: permanent support, special support, emergency support, information and analysis support and third country support. Under permanent support, EASO: organised 14 train-the-trainer sessions in Malta, two training sessions in Luxembourg and one train-the-trainer session in Greece; updated nine training modules; adopted a training strategy; and organised the annual didactic seminar. EASO also developed a quality assessment methodology, organised 16 COI working party meetings and the COI Task Force, further developed its COI methodology, published two COI reports on Afghanistan, organised three practical cooperation workshops and arranged four expert meetings on unaccompanied minors. In the category of special support, EASO launched special support to Sweden and presented its fact-finding report on intra-EU relocation measures to the Parliament, the Council and the Commission.

Regarding emergency support, EASO provided this to Greece during the whole year and to Luxembourg in February 2012. Under the category information and analysis support, it published its annual report on the situation of asylum in the EU in 2011. Moreover, it produced and presented early warning analysis and trends prognosis on the asylum situation in the EU to the Council and other partners. Specific analysis and data were produced on the asylum situation regarding Syria, and two workshops were also organised on this country. With regard to third country support, EASO organised a conference on resettlement and participated in a number of meetings within the framework of the EU mobility partnerships with Tunisia and Morocco and the Budapest process.

EASO activities positively contributed to the implementation of the CEAS. It is noteworthy that the the European Parliament, the Council, the Commission and the Member States value the work of EASO and have repeatedly requested more and extended EASO activities. For example, the JHA Council conclusions of 8 March 2012 foresee an important role for EASO in the Early Warning, Preparedness and Crisis Management Mechanism foreseen under Article 33 of the Dublin III Regulation.

1.4. EASO's results in 2012

In this section EASO's result for each activity is provided. For a full progress report on the different activities, please see Annex 5.1. Moreover, the implementation by EASO of the assigned priorities for EASO in the Stockholm programme is provided in Annex 5.2.

1.4.1. Permanent support

EASO training

14 train-the-trainer sessions in Malta

160 trainers trained by EASO

93 national training sessions

1 146 asylum officials trained in the EU

EASO training strategy adopted

2 national training sessions in Luxembourg

5 national training sessions and 1 train-the-trainer session in Greece

9 training modules updated

2 training National Contact Points meetings in Malta

2 new training modules initiated for development

EASO annual didactic seminar

Annual meeting with the training reference group

Start developing training to members of courts and tribunals

Transfer of European Asylum Curriculum (EAC) servers to EASO

With the adoption of a training strategy in July 2012, EASO established a clear framework for the provision of training support under Article 6 of the EASO regulation. In line with the responsibility assigned to EASO in the Commission communication on enhanced intra-EU solidarity in the field of asylum, and in close consultation with Member States, EASO initiated the development of a system, the EASO training cockpit, to assist Member States in setting up and monitoring national training targets. Based on the data provided by Member States on staffing and training, EASO developed sample visual analyses that were presented at the Management Board in September. Furthermore, EASO adopted specific training recommendations to facilitate a common understanding of EASO's training tools, namely EASO's training curriculum.

EASO is still working on further developing the training cockpit, but the system has already succeeded in stimulating the provision of training and promoting a discussion on common training goals. Presenting the situation from an EU perspective has also increased awareness of the importance of training for the implementation of the CEAS.

In the course of 2012, EASO provided Member States with quality training materials and support with regard to training organisation and delivery of training courses. Such support was mainly provided through the implementation of the EASO training curriculum, which covers core aspects of the asylum procedure by means of 13 interactive modules⁽¹⁾ that follow a blended learning methodology, combining online e-learning and face-to-face sessions.

Training materials are developed and updated by EASO with the assistance of knowledgeable and experienced teams of experts drawn from a pool of over 180 experts from 16 Member States, Norway and Switzerland that was set up in 2011. To reduce the risk associated with the limited availability of trainers, EASO has strengthened its structure with the adoption of clear procedures and practices.

⁽¹⁾ The 13 modules are: Interview Techniques, Evidence Assessment, Inclusion, Interviewing Children, the Dublin Regulation, Drafting and Decision-Making, Interviewing Children, Country of Origin Information, International Refugee Law and Human Rights, Interviewing Vulnerable Persons, Exclusion, Interview Techniques, End of Protection and the Common European Asylum System. This latter module is being developed and should be ready by the end of this year.

EASO has also established a reference group, consisting of representatives from different organisations, specifically the European Commission, UNHCR, the International Association of Refugee Law Judges (IARLJ), Academia (Odysseus Network) and the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), which play an important role in the development and updating of EASO training materials.

In 2012, EASO updated nine of its training modules and launched the development of two new modules, on interview techniques and the CEAS. It also held 14 train-the-trainer sessions in Malta for over 160 national trainers from 19 Member States, and supported Member States in organising over 100 national training sessions in 12 EU Member States from which over 1 100 participants have benefited. Additionally, specific EASO training — in the framework of EASO emergency support — was given to Luxembourg (two sessions in January 2012) and Greece (five national training sessions and one train-the-trainer session). EASO considers this as a significant achievement, which endorses its sustainable approach to training.

During the year, EASO has prepared the procurement of services of maintenance and support to minimise technical challenges stemming from the operation of the online platform and facilitate the timely management of training content and courses.

Article 6 of the EASO regulation specifies that EASO shall establish and develop training available to members of courts and tribunals in the Member States. For this purpose, it shall take advantage of the expertise of academic institutions and other relevant organisations, and take into account the Union's existing cooperation in the field with full respect to the independence of national courts and tribunals.

To tackle this challenging task in a meaningful and respectful way, EASO has sought the support of IARLJ and the Association of European Administrative Judges (AEAJ) and engaged in a process of consultation with members of courts and tribunals across the EU. A meeting held in December fostered a meaningful reflection on the principle of judicial independence, and an exchange of views on the role that second instance decision-makers can play in the implementation of the CEAS. In preparation for the meeting, EASO produced a questionnaire that provided an overview of relevant institutions and bodies with responsibilities for asylum matters and information on the scope of judicial review in different Member States. A broad and high-level participation in this meeting confirmed that court and tribunal members were increasingly interested in engaging in EASO's activities, as well as a commitment to strive for consistency in second instance decision-making.

Furthermore, the reflections during the year provide a good basis for a work plan that will inform EASO's support to Member State courts and tribunals in 2013, including the consolidation of a strategy to consider the establishment of a pilot database of EU jurisprudence and professional development initiatives available to newly appointed and experienced refugee law judges.

Quality processes

Development of a quality assessment methodology to produce a quality matrix as a results-oriented support initiative in order to enable Member States to exchange good practices, tools and expertise on quality in the field of asylum

EASO's quality activities build on the efforts invested by Member States, the European Commission, UNHCR and other relevant stakeholders by enabling Member States to exchange good practices, tools and expertise. EASO facilitates this exchange through the quality matrix launched in 2012.

The quality matrix is a results-oriented support initiative, which is undertaken in cooperation with the European Commission. It intends to cover comprehensively all areas of the CEAS, taking an up-to-date view of the situation on the ground. The results will be used to develop and maintain a database of good practices, quality mechanisms and tools and quality projects and initiatives. The quality matrix also enables EASO to identify support needs. Based on ongoing analysis, EASO will consider and develop relevant products and tools to assist Member States in the effective implementation of high quality standards in their asylum processes.

The quality matrix process is largely dependent on the active cooperation of Member States. Their involvement is necessary at the initial stage of collecting information, as well as during the thematic meetings. EASO aims at maintaining Member States' interest and active involvement in the exercise through balancing the burden on their resources and the added value of this support activity.

Following an internal EASO preparatory phase and preliminary consultations with selected partners, including the European Commission and UNHCR, the quality matrix activities started with an introductory meeting in November 2012 and engaged Member States in an active consultation process.

By the end of 2012, EASO had introduced the methodology and objectives of the quality matrix and conducted thorough consultations with the relevant actors. During this consultation the methodology of the quality matrix was further developed, taking into account comments and suggestions received from Member States, the European Commission and other stakeholders.

As a component of the future database of good practices, EASO developed a list of projects and initiatives in 2012. The aim was to meet Member States' need for reliable and up-to-date information on the projects and initiatives that have taken place since 2004, and to be a good reference point for the outcomes and tools created by them. It is developed and regularly updated with further information provided by Member States, also via quality matrix research tools.

Country of Origin Information

2 EASO COI reports on Afghanistan

EASO report on COI methodology

European common COI portal

Adoption of the COI network approach

Building upon Member States' expertise, past cooperation experiences and existing regional and EU-wide networks, EASO further increased its capacity to deal with COI issues and organised its first COI-specific activities in 2012. To establish its COI function, EASO set up different consultative structures in which national COI units and the European Commission were represented. A task force and reference group provided input on general issues and specific working parties were created on methodology, practical cooperation, the COI common portal and knowledge management.

With the help of the Working Party on Methodology, EASO developed a methodology for drafting analytical EASO COI reports. Based on this, two reports on Afghanistan were drafted. In July, EASO published the report 'Afghanistan: Taliban strategies — recruitment'. Feedback on this was taken into account when drafting the second report, 'Insurgent strategies: Intimidation and targeted violence against Afghans', which was published in December. The drafting of both reports included an extensive analysis of end users' needs and quality control through peer review.

In the context of EASO's operational support to Greece, a number of Member States assisted by developing COI factsheets on top countries of origin.

Supported by the Working Party on the Common COI Portal, EASO maintained and further developed the European common COI portal. Designed by the European Commission as a single web-based entry point for Member States to access COI, the portal was finally transferred to EASO at the end of 2012, after different development phases. The working party helped to identify the portal's new functionalities (notification system, hyperlinks, tree structure and front page for the upload area) and elaborated household rules for the use of the upload area. In 2012, the French and Norwegian databases joined MILO (Germany) on the portal, and other national databases are expected to be linked in the course of 2013 (Sweden, Finland).

In late 2012, EASO worked on the development of a proposal for EASO to adopt a COI network approach in regard to EU-level COI (and this was approved by the EASO Management Board in February 2013). The approach links different COI-related EASO activities into one coherent structure and makes use of the available resources in the most effective way. The two core elements (the ‘engine of the system’) of the EASO COI network strategy are: (1) the creation of a strategic COI network composed of COI Heads of Units or experts from all Member States, associated countries, the European Commission and UNHCR, to discuss issues at a strategic level — including cross-cutting COI practices; and (2) a series of specific expert networks gathering COI experts from Member States on a specific country, region, or theme, who can exchange information and harmonise COI practices in their specific area of expertise. Both types of networks will be facilitated and coordinated by EASO, which will act as a secretariat and manage the resources assigned to COI activities in the agency’s work programme.

EASO list of available languages

Establishment of the EASO list of available languages

The EASO list of available languages (LAL) is in place and currently numbers 264. It includes all languages generally available for direct translation from the named foreign language to the mother tongue of the named Member State.

A meeting was organised between EASO and the National Contact Points as focal points for interpretation matters (FPI NCP) on 23 and 24 May 2012 in Malta. It has to be taken into account that in general interpreters used by Member States in asylum matters are not civil servants, but rather self-employed. Therefore, the entries in the LAL do not constitute a guarantee that a certain language is available if requested by another MS.

EASO practical cooperation

Plenary Eurasil hand-over meeting

2 Syria workshops

Conference on Afghanistan

In 2012, a Working Party on Practical Cooperation provided EASO with recommendations on how best to organise expert workshops, taking into account the activities, methodologies and tools of the European Union network for asylum practitioners, Eurasil, which was transferred to EASO in March 2012 during a plenary hand-over meeting.

In response to the emerging situation in Syria and its effects on EU Member States, EASO organised its first practical cooperation workshop on Syria, on 28 and 29 June in Malta. This workshop lasted for a day and a half, and, for the first time, brought together COI specialists and policy practitioners. A number of policy and COI issues, which had been identified prior to the workshop by means of a questionnaire, were discussed in several break-out sessions (including risk assessment for Kurds, internal flight alternatives, the security situation, *sur place* claims and armed and non-armed opposition).

In August, upon the request of the European Commission in the context of the Syria Network, a follow-up workshop on Syria focused on scenario-based policy issues. Speakers (UNHCR, International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and academics) provided a comprehensive update of the refugee situation in neighbouring countries and the security context.

In November, EASO organised a conference on ‘Afghanistan: Country of Origin Information and beyond’. The conference featured presentations by key experts on Afghanistan, break-out sessions on a wide range of topics and discussions on how to keep on developing methodologies and tools to refine the involvement of all those concerned by the Afghan caseload. Besides Member State experts, the conference was attended by judges, academics and NGOs specialising in Afghanistan.

Unaccompanied minors

EASO introductory session on unaccompanied minors and age assessment

4 expert meetings on unaccompanied minors and age assessment

EASO's work on unaccompanied minors is carried out within the framework of the European Commission action plan on unaccompanied minors (2010–14) ⁽²⁾, which calls for a common approach to tackling the challenges relating to the arrival in the European Union of large numbers of unaccompanied minors. The action plan is based on the principle of the best interests of the child and sets out three main strands: prevention, protection and durable solutions.

Between February and April 2012, EASO commissioned a questionnaire for Member States on current policy and practice relating to age assessment and unaccompanied minors. This was followed by wider consultation with relevant experts from civil society (academics, intergovernmental organisations, NGOs, medical practitioners), members of courts and tribunals in the Member States, the Commission and other EU agencies.

During 2012, EASO held a series of expert meetings on age assessment, which sought to address the key issues, challenges and good practices available. The aim was to facilitate information sharing and exchange of practice. Member State administrations and the European Commission were joined by other relevant practitioners with expertise in the field, including UNHCR, NGOs, members of courts and tribunals in the Member States, medical practitioners, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) and Unicef. By opening up participation to other relevant experts, EASO widened the debate to include a range of perspectives, further enhancing the scope for joint cooperation not just between Member States and the European Commission, but also between other EU agencies and organisations. The outcome was the creation of an annual conference on activities relating to unaccompanied minors and the establishment of a network of experts.

The final session on age assessment provided an opportunity for defining the scope and content of the handbook on age assessment. EASO also presented a draft framework of content to be included in the handbook and invited participants to give feedback and additional input for consideration. Drafting of the handbook, which will provide guidance on age assessment issues, commenced in 2012 and it is due to be published in 2013.

EASO's work on unaccompanied minors was also reflected in the EASO conference on 'Afghanistan: Country of Origin Information and beyond', held in November, in the form of a workshop addressing the need to develop child-specific COI. Moreover, work started during the year on family tracing.

Additional information on EASO's and other actors' activities relating to the action plan on unaccompanied minors can be found in the Commission's 'Mid-term report on the implementation of the action plan on unaccompanied minors' and the Commission staff working document ⁽³⁾.

1.4.2. Special support

Tailor-made support and capacity building

EASO special support plan for Sweden signed in December 2012

Special support request from Italy

⁽²⁾ In the action plan, which runs from 2010–14, the following tasks are assigned to EASO: significant improvement of the exchange of information on unaccompanied minors; collection of data and development of COI and analysis for assessing the protection needs of UM with a view to better supporting quality decisions; monitoring the issue of UM who are asylum seekers; developing best practices regarding reception conditions, asylum procedures and integration of UM; and technical documentation on age assessment, including training activities, developing a specific training and a handbook on age assessment.

⁽³⁾ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-12-1033_en.htm?locale=en

Following a request made by the Swedish Migration Board and in line with the EASO regulation, EASO rendered special support to Sweden in early 2013. This special support has taken into consideration the need to reinforce the asylum system with more trained personnel.

The special support was agreed upon since the relevant EASO training modules were not initially scheduled by EASO when the Swedish Migration Board needed its personnel to be trained. A special support plan was thus signed between EASO and the Swedish Migration Board in December 2012. EASO supported Sweden with training for the Swedish Migration Board on international refugee law and human rights and on inclusion, in February 2013.

Italy requested special support to improve and enhance its asylum and reception system. The Executive Director decided on 13 December 2012 to render this special support via joint expertise between EASO and the Member States, based on the fact that Italy's present asylum and reception system faces major challenges. The finalisation and signing of the plan will be concluded in 2013. The request by Italy is very timely with regard to the implementation of the asylum package, which will present additional challenges for its asylum and reception system.

Relocation

Fact-finding report on intra-EU relocation projects from Malta

In line with the the March 2012 JHA Council conclusions, the European Commission asked EASO to draft a report on intra-EU relocation measures from Malta. The report also included Norway and Switzerland, UNHCR and the IOM (project leaders). All EU Member States, associated countries and project leaders completed questionnaires sent to them by EASO. A number of interviews were conducted, including with relocated beneficiaries.

EASO compiled the findings into a report, which it presented to the European Commission in July 2012 and to the EASO Management Board in September. The EASO Executive Director presented the report at the ministerial lunch of the October JHA Council, and subsequently to the European Parliament. The report was then made public.

The EASO report has confirmed that Member States largely justify their decision to participate or not in such measures on a political basis. Member States have expressed mixed views about the use of relocation. While a number of participating states maintained that voluntary ad hoc relocation measures with Malta were a concrete tool for demonstrating intra-EU solidarity, and generally assessed them positively, other states feared that regular and protracted use of stand-alone relocation in situations of disproportionate pressure could act as a pull factor for irregular migration and thus exacerbate the pressure rather than reducing it.

However, the exercise has also shown that there is hope for similar more successful projects in the future and there is significant room for improving the processes that make up the current framework of the pilot project for intra-EU relocation from Malta (Eurema). Nevertheless, while relocation can both offer lasting solutions for beneficiaries of international protection and alleviate pressure on Member States' asylum systems, it must not result in responsibility shifting. In fact, some respondents argued that intra-EU relocation should be part of a range of intra-EU solidarity measures, including capacity building, other forms of practical cooperation and flexible financial support, with EASO playing a key role in line with its founding regulation.

The European Commission has indicated that it will propose a way forward on relocation. The Commission created the scope for Union co-financing of such activities in its proposal for an Asylum and Migration Fund (AMF), consolidating and further developing what is already possible under the European Refugee Fund (ERF). This will facilitate action by Member States willing to engage in voluntary projects, with EASO taking a coordinating role.

1.4.3. Emergency support

Asylum Intervention Pool

National Contact Points meeting

EASO Management Board decision on the Asylum Intervention Pool containing 20 profiles

EASO Management Board Decision No 3 on the overall number and profiles of the experts to be made available for the Asylum Support Teams (Asylum Intervention Pool) defined 13 categories of profiles ('AIP 13'). On 19 June 2012, the Asylum Intervention Pool included 345 experts from 21 Member States.

The decision was reviewed on the basis of experience gathered from EASO in the Management Board meeting on that date. The issue had been discussed in the meeting between EASO and the National Contact Points for the Asylum Intervention Pool (AIP NCP) on 22 and 23 May in Malta and was based on the experience gathered from the deployment of asylum support teams to Greece and Luxembourg.

In its meeting on 19 June the Management Board repealed Decision No 3 and agreed on Decision No 8 on the overall number and the profiles of the experts to be made available for the asylum support teams (Asylum Intervention Pool). While some profiles were deleted or changed, others were amended. According to the new decision, the AIP shall cover 20 experts' profiles ('AIP 20') and the overall number of experts in the AIP shall be a minimum of 100. EASO asked Member States to nominate experts for the amended profiles by 1 October 2012. The experts were requested to provide CVs in the Europass format.

Operating plan for Luxembourg

EASO operating plan for Luxembourg signed in January 2012

2 ASTs deployed in Luxembourg

Following a situation of particular pressure on its asylum system and the subsequent request by the Luxembourg authorities, the Executive Director of EASO decided to deploy Asylum Support Teams to Luxembourg under an operating plan signed on 26 January 2012. The support aimed to train the newly hired staff in the EASO training modules on interviewing techniques and decision-making, in order to reinforce the refugee unit with more trained personnel and help increase its capacity to deal with the unprecedented and urgent pressure on Luxembourg's asylum system. With the operating plan, Luxembourg has committed itself to the EASO training programme with its own specialised trainers for the future, in line with EASO and EU policy. By the end of 2012, Luxembourg had seven trainers in four different modules in its refugee unit.

Operating plan for Greece

Implementation of the EASO operating plan for Greece

37 EASO Asylum Support Teams deployed to tackle a backlog, supporting the establishment of a sustainable and efficient asylum structure and quality in the asylum process

EASO–UNHCR project for operational support to Greece in tackling the backlog

Following a request made by the Greek government and in line with the Greek national action plan on asylum and migration management (2010) and the EASO regulation, in February 2011, EASO agreed to support Greece with the establishment of its new asylum service, first reception service, new appeals authority, reception in general and reduction of the backlog via the deployment of experts from over 10 EU Member States via Asylum Support

Teams (ASTs). The basis for these deployments is the EASO operating plan for Greece, which was signed on 1 April 2011 and was in effect until 31 March 2013.

In 2012, the emergency support was provided via the deployment of EASO experts in 37 ASTs, bringing the total of ASTs for Greece to 52 over the 2-year period. These activities consisted of tailor-made support teams composed of experts nominated by the Member States and deployed to the Hellenic Police, first reception service, asylum service, appeals authority and Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Welfare. EASO coordinated the whole process of ASTs in Greece. The activities of these ASTs were targeted at supporting the Greek authorities with the reduction of the backlog, the construction of new, sustainable structures and services, improving the quality of the asylum process, registration and analysis in the field of asylum and reception and various other topics like increasing the reception capacity for vulnerable categories and the use of solidarity funds.

In addition, EASO and UNHCR signed a grant agreement (on 22 November 2012) for a project for operational support in strengthening the administrative appeals instance of the asylum procedure in Greece, including the clearance of the backlog of appeals. A first phase of the project to clear the backlog had already started, namely the identification and mobilisation of police cadets to support the identification of inactive cases, the updating of physical files and the electronic registration in a 'police online' database. This administrative cleansing process and registration of all pending cases was done by 92 police cadets in the Ministry of Public Order and Citizen Protection from 1 October 2012 to 22 January 2013. A specific training session on asylum and international protection issues was organised on 23 and 24 November 2012 by the ministry, UNHCR and EASO.

A second phase of the project (under a grant agreement with EASO and UNHCR) was planned for January to March 2013. This phase aimed to increase the capacity to process and conduct individual interviews of active appeals cases, by the establishment (by 1 April 2013) of 10 additional appeals and special committees (added to the 10 existing ones), including secretarial support and interpretation services.

1.4.4. Information and analysis support

EASO annual report

Publication of EASO annual report on the situation of asylum in the European Union and on the activities of the European Asylum Support Office in 2011

EASO produced its first annual report on the situation concerning asylum in the EU in June 2012. At the end of the year, it presented a proposal to the Management Board more clearly defining the focus and scope of the annual report (including the proposal that it be separated from the annual activity report), plus a statement of principles which further underlined the aim that the report be objective and comprehensive. A more detailed table of contents was proposed, so that all future reports will be structured in the same way, thus improving ease of reference and comparability over the years. Finally, a regular timetable was proposed to ensure that all relevant stakeholders are consulted in good time and that clear deadlines are provided to each contributor and reviewer.

Early warning and Preparedness System

EASO data analysis quarterly reports

Data analysis for presentations in the EASO Management Board, JHA Council, IGC, GDISC, EASO workshops, conferences and expert meetings

Ad hoc reports on Syria and the western Balkans

In 2012, EASO began to develop its analysis capacity by producing a number of analyses (for the Management Board, annual report, JHA Council, European Parliament, General Directors of Immigration Services' Conference (GDISC), intergovernmental conference (IGC) and others) using Eurostat data. It also began collecting operational

data directly from Member States using a basic template on a monthly basis and, in the context of practical cooperation on the Syrian influx, for Syria weekly. Analyses were produced on the recognition rates, and on the western Balkans and Syria. At the end of 2012, the Management Board agreed that EASO would produce regular quarterly reports giving a general overview of the functioning of the CEAS.

Strategically, and in the context of political agreement on the content of the Dublin III Regulation (Article 33), EASO developed and proposed a step-by-step plan for increasing EASO's data collection and analysis capacity in regard to statistical indicators (both qualitative and quantitative) in the field of asylum, building on its early experience with quarterly and ad hoc analyses, plus the statistics produced by Member States for Eurostat. This proposal for an Early warning and Preparedness System (EPS) also foresaw the creation of a Group for the Provision of Statistics (GPS) composed of experts nominated by Member States to be their points of contact in regard to statistical and data-collection questions in the field of asylum. The GPS will operate in a similar way to the Frontex Risk Analysis Network (FRAN). Work progressed on a detailed table of 22 quantitative and qualitative indicators aimed at providing an accurate and comprehensive overview of the entire CEAS in conjunction with the European Commission (DG Home Affairs, Eurostat) and Frontex to ensure consistency and avoid duplication of work for Member States.

1.4.5. Third country support

Resettlement

EASO resettlement seminar

Resettlement is one of the key measures for internal and external solidarity. According to the EASO work programme for 2012, one of the responsibilities of EASO was to provide a structure for exchanging information and establishing cooperation activities among Member States and also with non-EU countries, UNHCR, IOM and other international organisations and NGOs concerned.

The first EASO seminar on EU resettlement policy took place on 22 and 23 October 2012. The meeting focused on the state of play of national resettlement schemes, on EU funding available for resettlement and on solidarity support seen from the social society perspective. This meeting brought together EU resettlement specialists and policy practitioners, under the coordination of EASO for the first time.

EASO addressed the EU Member States' solidarity support in view of setting up common EU resettlement goals. It was agreed to promote resettlement cooperation in Europe, by also using the EU Resettlement Network (<http://www.resettlement.eu>) as a cooperation tool for information sharing, multi-stakeholder meetings and exchange of good practices, through outreach, training, study visits, research and piloting of new methods.

EU Member States shall further support each other in resettlement planning, coordination and implementation of resettlement activities through the exchange of good practices and cooperation in developing new or sustainable programmes. EASO is considered to have a key role in coordination, acting as a focal point and facilitator of EU resettlement know-how and practices.

EASO will support emergency resettlement and will convene a coordination meeting with Member States and UNHCR in early autumn each year, in order to identify the resettlement needs in Europe and support the Member States in making annual commitments and providing for complementarity of intakes, in light of the available EU funding in the field.

External dimension

Participation in the Budapest process

Participation in meetings on the EU mobility partnerships with Tunisia and Morocco

Participation in the EU–Jordan mobility partnership meeting

The EASO regulation gives EASO the mandate to coordinate the exchange of information and other action taken on issues arising from the implementation of instruments and mechanisms relating to the external dimension of the CEAS. Pursuant to its mandate, and in accordance with Article 49, EASO, in agreement with the European Commission, has sought cooperation with competent authorities of third over technical matters, in particular with a view to promoting and assisting capacity building in these countries' own asylum and reception systems and implementing regional protection programmes and other actions relevant to durable solutions.

However, as was confirmed in its work programme for 2012, due to the limited budget and staff available during the year, EASO could only concentrate on small tasks within the external dimension. It took part in meetings within the EU mobility partnerships with Tunisia and Morocco and the EU–Jordan dialogue on migration, mobility and security, and declared its intentions for cooperation under the framework of the EU–Tunisia and EU–Morocco mobility partnerships. Furthermore, EASO participated in meetings of the Budapest process: one meeting focused on south-east Europe and EASO contributed significantly to the development of asylum aspects of the drafting process of the Istanbul Ministerial Declaration on a Silk Routes Partnership for Migration.

EASO is also cooperating on a pilot basis in the context of the pilot project 'Quality and training in the asylum processes', which is implemented within the framework of the Prague Process targeted initiative. This pilot project aims at exploring the possibility of a broader implementation of the training programme for the EASO training curriculum in the Eastern neighbourhood countries of the EU (Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and Ukraine) as well as Turkey. In 2012, EASO's capacity was limited to attending the meetings of the Prague Process.

2. Management and internal control standards

2.1. EASO management and organisation

2.1.1. EASO Management Board

The Management Board is the governing and planning body of EASO. Its key functions are outlined in Article 29 of the EASO regulation and include: appointment of the Executive Director; adoption of the work programmes and annual reports of EASO; the general budget; and overall responsibility for ensuring that EASO performs its duties effectively. The Management Board is composed of one member from each Member State (except Denmark), two members from the European Commission and one non-voting member of UNHCR. All members are appointed on the basis of their experience, professional responsibility and high degree of expertise in the field of asylum.

Denmark is invited to attend as observer all meetings of the Management Board and other relevant meetings. Croatia enjoyed the same status, until it becomes a full member of the European Union and thus member of the Management Board with voting rights, following the entry into force of the Treaty of Accession between the EU and Croatia of 9 December 2011.

In sum the EASO Management Board is composed of 28 full Members, one non-voting member (UNHCR) and two observer states.

During 2012, the associated countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland) were invited to participate in the discussion of selected items as observers. Frontex was also invited to contribute and to attend certain discussions of the Management Board, especially with regard to asylum in the EU, the Early warning and Preparedness System and the situation in Greece.

The Management Board held four meetings in 2012 and adopted the following decisions:

- Decision No 7 of 9 April 2012 concerning the appraisal of the Executive Director;
- Decision No 8 of 19 June 2012 on the profiles and the overall numbers of the experts to be made available for the asylum support teams (Asylum Intervention Pool);
- Decision No 9 of 19 June 2012 on the Rules of Procedure of the Management Board of EASO;
- Decision No 10 of 4 July 2012 on the adoption of implementing rules to the staff regulations;
- Decision No 11 of 4 July 2012 on middle management staff;
- Decision No 12 of 4 July 2012 on the general implementing provisions on the procedure governing the engagement and the use of temporary agents at EASO;
- Decision No 13 of 4 July 2012 on the general implementing provisions on the procedures governing the engagement and the use of contract staff at EASO;
- Decision No 14 of 4 July 2012 setting up a staff committee;
- Decision No 15 of 1 November 2012 concerning the terms and conditions for internal investigations in relation to the prevention of fraud, corruption and any illegal activity detrimental to the Union's interests;
- Decision No 16 of 23 November 2012 detailing the rules on costs relating to the implementation of operating plans for the deployment of asylum support teams;
- Decision No 17 of 23 November 2012 on internal control standards for effective management.

2.1.2. EASO organisation

The Executive Director is independent in the performance of his or her tasks and is the legal representative of EASO. The Executive Director is responsible, inter alia, for the administrative management of EASO and for the implementation of the work programme and the decisions of the Management Board.

Working parties composed of experts may be set up by EASO according to Article 32 of the EASO regulation.

The Executive Director is directly supported by four Heads of Unit/Centre, an Advisor, a Communications Officer, the Accounting Officer and a Legal Officer. The Office of the Executive Director has the responsibility for coordinating the drafting of documents and for internal and external communication. Currently EASO is composed of four units/centres, as follows.

- GAAU (General Affairs and Administration Unit)
- CIDA (Centre for Information, Documentation and Analysis)
- COS (Centre for Operational Support)
- CTQE (Centre for Training, Quality and Expertise).

The Executive Director and the four Heads of Unit/Centre convene every week in a management team meeting to monitor progress on EASO's activities and organisation.

The General Affairs and Administration Unit (GAAU) is divided into the General Affairs Division (ICT, logistics, document management/data protection, mission management, events and meeting organisation and security) and the Administration Division (human resources, finance and budget, procurement and contracts).

At the end of 2012, the 58 staff were distributed as follows: GAAU 24, CIDA 13; COS 10; and CTQE 11.

On 3 September 2012, EASO moved to its definitive premises made available by the Maltese government as part of its bid to host the Office. Until that moment, EASO had operated from an interim location in Marsa, Malta. Some of EASO's administrative support staff who were based and located in Brussels until 1 October were also transferred to Malta.

EASO obtained its financial independence on 20 September, and actively participated in the deployment of necessary resources and the establishment of its building in Malta. Essentially, areas such as human resources, procurement, finance and accounting, logistics and ICT were involved in the preparation of the implementing rules and regulations as well as internal documents on the framework and guidelines regarding the management, reporting, monitoring and execution of respective activities. A significant number of studies, surveys and analyses on existing or similar rules and regulations were performed, in particular with other EU agencies with considerable experience and best practices. As mentioned, in 2012, EASO initiated the administration of its budget under the provisions of its financial regulations — approved by the Management Board — which were based on the EU framework financial regulation applicable to all EU agencies. In addition, several decisions of the EASO Management Board and of the Executive Director were adopted in order to ensure the principles and standards of public finance management and to support EASO centres in their operations.

Considering EASO's first year of activity, and in order to achieve its operational and administrative objectives, particular attention was given to recruitment and selection of staff, within the scope of the activities related to human resources. Accountability and responsibility within the organisation could only be achieved with an adequate number of staff and experts on board. Therefore, in terms of recruitment, EASO filled all positions foreseen in the establishment plan, thus ensuring that the work programme for 2012 could be successfully completed, in particular for the tasks to be performed by the EASO centres.

During 2012, EASO established a corporate ICT infrastructure and successfully set up a number of services such as its website (<http://www.easo.europa.eu>), corporate e-mail, a secure share drive, remote access to e-mail via the Internet, synchronisation of corporate e-mails on mobile phones and remote access to some corporate systems via secure connection from EASO's mobile computers. All these services allowed it to achieve ICT independence. The transfer of all business and private data from the Commission IT network and servers to those of EASO was successfully executed. The entire ICT infrastructure, including end-user equipment, was transferred from temporary to permanent premises without any breakdown in business.

EASO joined a number of DG Informatics (DIGIT) framework contracts concerning software licences and hardware. In this way, it ensured very good price performance for services and acquisitions. EASO became the system owner of two major portals — the Country of Origin (COI) and e-learning (EASO training) platforms. In addition, the e-learning portal was entirely transferred to EASO's ICT infrastructure, and know-how to EASO staff. Support and maintenance of the COI portal was successfully achieved by the transfer of know-how to EASO staff and through a contract with an external company for maintenance and support.

In 2012, it was necessary to identify the basic logistics and security equipment for the running of EASO, as well as necessary services for building maintenance, security and other works. Consultations with the European Commission were considerable, in order to identify the extent to which accelerated procurement procedures could be used. As a consequence, procurement dossiers for equipment, services and works were intensively prepared.

For more details on EASO's organisational output, see the list of EASO publications in 2012 in Annex 5.3. Annex 5.4 includes a report on access to documents. Annex 5.5 gives more details on EASO's implementation of the budget and budgetary and financial management, and Annex 5.6 provides a list of exceptional negotiated procedures in 2012.

2.1.3. Cooperation with partners and stakeholders

Cooperation with the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission

In 2012, the Executive Director of EASO appeared at two hearings of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) of the European Parliament and participated in several meetings of the JHA Council. In addition, EASO attended meetings of the Strategic Committee on Immigration, Frontiers and Asylum (SCIFA) of the Council of the European Union and organised a meeting with the Secretariat of the LIBE Committee of the European Parliament. Moreover, EASO developed continuous cooperation with the European Commission, particularly with its partner DG Home Affairs, on administration and policy issues. A formal policy dialogue has been established between EASO and the Commission (DG Home Affairs), including monthly meetings between the heads of the respective units. EASO and the Commission also work closely on the implementation of the joint actions related to Article 33 of the draft Dublin III Regulation, intra-EU relocation, training, quality, unaccompanied minors and family tracing, COI and Greece. As mentioned previously, the Management Board of EASO has adopted a decision on cooperation with the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) in order to prevent fraud, corruption and any illegal activity detrimental to the Union's interests.

Cooperation with UNHCR

UNHCR participated in every meeting of the Management Board as a non-voting member, as well as in the EASO working groups, expert meetings and workshops. In order to discuss strategic and operational cooperation, senior management consultations between EASO and UNHCR took place in July 2012. In November, EASO signed a contribution agreement with UNHCR, aiming at supporting Greece in building capacities in its asylum system and tackling the backlog of asylum cases. Furthermore, the first meetings for negotiating a framework working arrangement between EASO and UNHCR were convened in the fourth quarter of 2012.

Cooperation with associate countries

Regarding cooperation with the associated countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland), the European Commission received a Council mandate to enter into negotiations concerning a working arrangement for the participation of these four countries on 13 January 2012. Three rounds of negotiations took place on 21 May, 7 September and 10 October, in which EASO participated as an observer. The arrangements, which are expected to be finalised in 2013, will enable the associated countries to formally participate in EASO's work.

In 2012, representatives of Croatia were invited to attend the Management Board meetings of EASO as observers, following the signature of the Treaty of Accession between the EU and Croatia of 9 December 2011. Denmark continued its participation in EASO as an observer.

Cooperation with other EU agencies

During 2012, bilateral and multilateral cooperation with EU agencies and bodies was enhanced. EASO joined the EU agencies' coordination network and the JHA agencies' network. The Executive Director of EASO participated in the heads of JHA agencies' meeting in December, and EASO representatives contributed to two JHA contact group meetings and to relevant meetings of the general EU agencies' coordination network. At bilateral level, EASO concluded a working arrangement with Frontex in September, in order to promote close cooperation in areas of common interest related to border management and international protection. EASO also contributed to the establishment of the Frontex Consultative Forum and became a permanent member of this body, participating in its first meeting in December. It also developed close cooperation with the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), conducting preliminary discussions in the third quarter of 2012 in order to conclude a working arrangement.

In the course of the year, EASO participated in intergovernmental consultations on migration, asylum and refugees (IGC), the General Directors of Immigration Services' Conference (GDISC), the Transatlantic Council on Migration and the European Law Academy (ERA).

2.1.4. Consultative Forum and cooperation with civil society

EASO continued to strengthen its relationship with civil society in 2012, and the membership base of the Consultative Forum grew to 55 organisations. Throughout the year, EASO consulted registered civil society organisations on various areas of its work: the annual work programme, annual report for 2011, training, quality, age assessment, the Early warning and Preparedness System, resettlement and COI. It received contributions from such organisations on the annual report, COI report methodology, age assessment and training modules. EASO also invited civil society organisations to participate in the conference on Afghanistan in November, which was open to Member States, members of courts and tribunals, academics and NGOs. The turnout was encouraging and the outcome demonstrated that when different actors come together to discuss specific topics, the result is more comprehensive.

In cooperation with the advisory group, EASO elaborated an operational plan for the Consultative Forum. The operational plan provides the general parameters for consultation that will be applied in a systematic manner, a framework for consultation that is coherent albeit flexible enough to allow for specific ad hoc consultation needs that might be necessary from time to time. Following its approval by the Executive Director, the Management Board endorsed it in September 2012. EASO has also nominated the Consultative Forum contact point, as a single point of contact with civil society, ensuring smoother and more effective communication between the various civil society actors and the different units within EASO.

EASO organised its second plenary meeting on 26 November 2012. Although EASO consults various organisations throughout the year, the plenary meeting has become a major event in the EASO calendar of activities, attracting around 75 participants, most of whom are NGOs working in the field of asylum.

Various notable actors in the field of asylum and migration addressed the forum this year, including Member of the European Parliament Cecilia Wikström and Cathryn Costello from the University of Oxford. At this meeting, EASO presented the Consultative Forum operational plan. Participants also had the opportunity to discuss key EASO products and services during break-out sessions, such as the EASO annual report and annual work programme for 2014, training, quality and unaccompanied minors and the Early warning and Preparedness System. EASO also presented a draft calendar of consultation activities during 2013, which was well received by participants.

Civil society organisations expressed their willingness to engage more closely with EASO and to provide relevant expertise. EASO welcomed suggestions and proposals made by civil society both on content and process and vouched to take them into consideration to the extent possible in its work during 2013.

2.2. EASO's internal control standards

EASO shall apply internal controls to ensure that operational activities are effective and efficient, that legal and regulatory requirements are met and that financial and other management processes are effective and reliable. These standards shall be equivalent to the ones adopted by the European Commission for its own departments and services. In this regard, the European Commission adopted 16 internal control standards in its communication (SEC(2007) 1341) of 16 October 2007. Hereto, the EASO Management Board adopted Decision No 17 of 23 November 2012 on internal control standards for effective management.

The 16 internal control standards for effective management are implemented as follows.

1. Mission

EASO's mission statement is clear and its work programme and activities are derived from this mission.

2. Ethical and organisational values

The adoption of a code of good administrative behaviour and its accessibility to all staff, together with the Staff Regulations, assures availability of a practical guide on ethical conduct, avoidance of conflicts of interest, fraud prevention and the reporting of irregularities. Continuous awareness of staff is ensured via the management, and new staff are given an induction on EASO's ethical and organisational values.

3. Staff allocation and mobility

The allocation and recruitment of staff is in line with the EASO's objectives and priorities. The multiannual staff policy plan assures alignment of staffing needs with EASO's planned activities. In 2012, EASO was still in a set-up phase and recruitment was one of the core tasks. Advance planning was present, aligning EASO's needs and priorities.

4. Staff appraisal and development

Annual staff performance appraisal is planned to be implemented in 2013. In 2012, measures were already taken for swift implementation in 2013. Staff evaluations will be based on assigned staff objectives. Moreover, staff development plans were under preparation in accordance with the EASO multiannual staff policy plan. Training needs are linked with the individual objectives and the individual objectives with the organisational ones. Every staff member is advised and encouraged to identify appropriate learning and development opportunities and needs in agreement with line management.

5. Objectives and performance indicators

In 2012, EASO worked on the basis of a specific set of objectives following the SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, timely) principle. Specific key performance indicators have been established for the 2014 work programme. In this annual activity report for 2012, a link has already been made to EASO's key performance indicator (see paragraph 1.3).

6. Risk management process

Risk management is a continuous exercise considering all EASO activities, from financial, planning and operational activities to business continuity and staff management. Risk screening takes place, whether it concerns financial or procurement procedures, or operational activities. In 2012, EASO was still in a set-up phase and therefore a full risk assessment exercise did not take place. In 2013, EASO will take up activities concerning a risk assessment exercise and the creation of a risk register.

7. Operational structure

EASO's operational structure and internal organisation are clearly defined in line with its organisation chart. Delegations of authority are clearly documented and communicated to the relevant staff. All financial actors are clearly identified and are aware of their roles and responsibilities. In 2012, EASO was still working on setting up a good IT governance structure and work on this will continue in 2013.

8. Processes and procedures

EASO's main processes and procedures, both operational and administrative, are described, formalised and implemented. The main financial processes and procedures were implemented as from 20 September 2012. As EASO is still in a phase of learning, adapting and experiencing, processes and procedures are continuously monitored and adapted if needed. Staff awareness is raised via internal communication procedures and new staff receive an extensive welcome pack in which the main processes are described. In 2012, EASO worked on 'the EASO handbook', which will be ready in 2013.

9. Management supervision

Management supervision is ensured via regular management team meetings and the different staff meetings in the operational centres and administrative unit(s). The monitoring of project implementation is supported by regular reporting to the Executive Director and the EASO Management Board. The monitoring of financial transactions by management is ensured with appropriate identification of financial roles (i.e. authorising officers, initiating agents and verifying agents) and supported by different checklists.

10. Business continuity

With regard to business continuity, in 2012, sufficient EASO staff were recruited to ensure that for every task concerning all EASO administrative and operational activities, back-ups are in place. Moreover, there is finally the possibility that EASO staff members can be added to certain projects when the need is there. This is already being put into practice, on both the operational and administrative levels. However, a full business continuity plan including provisions on what to do when natural disasters strike EASO's work is still not present. In 2012, EASO gave top priority to setting up the basic structures. In 2013/14, it will do further work on a business continuity plan.

11. Document management

Appropriate processes and procedures are in place to ensure that EASO's document management is secure, efficient (in particular as regards retrieving appropriate information) and complies with applicable legislation. EASO has a document manager/data protection officer in place.

12. Information and communication

Internal communication enables management and staff to fulfil their responsibilities effectively and efficiently, including in the domain of internal control. EASO has an external communication strategy, which was adopted by the EASO Management Board in June 2012, to ensure that its external communication is effective, coherent and in line with EASO's key political messages. In 2012, EASO worked on its dedicated website, to be launched early in 2013.

13. Accounting and financial reporting

EASO's Accounting Officer was appointed by the Management Board on 8 June 2012 and took office on 16 August. Accounting and financial reporting are the responsibility of the Accounting Officer, who is performing, since financial independence on 20 September 2012, additional controls and analysis, such as checks before releasing payments, reconciliations of accounts and analysis of accounts and balances.

14. Evaluation of activities

All EASO activities are evaluated. Feedback from these evaluations is documented and analysed to ensure a continuous development and improvement of future activities. As EASO is still in its first years of operations, activities are evaluated internally or externally with participants, stakeholders or Consultative Forum (through evaluation forms).

Examples of EASO's evaluation activities:

- Scoreboard on EASO activities under the Operating Plan Phase I for Greece;
- Standard evaluation form for emergency and special support plans;
- Qualitative process evaluation of deliverables within emergency and special support, e.g. evaluation of the operating plan in Luxembourg of January/February 2012;
- Evaluation form for plenary Consultative Forum;
- Feedback mechanism for EASO training, expert meetings and other workshops through specially designed forms, as well as through discussions during meetings and evaluation meetings with the team;
- Didactic analysis/evaluation of the EASO training tools and content;
- Discussions with National Contact Points during NCP meetings regarding the different operational activities (operational support, training etc.).

In 2013, EASO will make further progress in structuring the different evaluation activities.

15. Assessment of internal control systems

To prepare for financial independence on 20 September 2012, EASO assessed its compliance with internal controls and their effectiveness. Due to this self-assessment, done in August 2012, further measures were taken to strengthen EASO's internal control systems. Self assessments will be planned once or twice a year.

16. Internal audit capability

N/A

2.3. Implementation by EASO of the roadmap on the follow-up to the common approach on EU decentralised agencies

In July 2012, the common approach on EU decentralised agencies was adopted by the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission, representing the first political agreement and political blueprint for agencies. Its main objectives are improved governance, enhanced efficiency, enhanced accountability and improved coherence. In this roadmap 90 initiatives are set to be taken by all actors involved: the European Commission, EU agencies, Member States, the European Parliament and the Council. Being a start-up agency, EASO already complies with most of the provisions of the roadmap. It is cooperating with the Commission to work towards the implementation of the few actions that still need to be fulfilled.

In Annex 5.7 a full overview is given of EASO's implementation of those initiatives which were dedicated to the EU agencies.

3. Building blocks towards the Declaration of Assurance

3.1. Building block 1: Assessment by management

The internal control standards for effective management were adopted with a view to supporting legality and regularity. These have been implemented through the adoption of procedures for virtually all financial processes; all statutory staff assigned to perform the duties of financial actors have received the necessary training on these procedure, as well as the related rules.

Whereas sound financial management is promoted as a guiding principle for the implementation of the budget, the level of economy, efficiency and effectiveness achieved with regard to financial transactions is commensurate to the availability of staff assigned to these tasks in the organisational start-up context from the achievement of financial independence on 20 September 2012 onwards.

For the purpose of the prevention of fraud, the rules and procedures governing the cooperation with OLAF were adopted and communicated to all staff.

3.2. Building block 2: Results from audits in 2012

3.2.1. Conclusions and follow-up of internal audit

The Internal Audit Service (IAS), part of the European Commission, visited EASO on 7 and 8 November 2012 for a limited risk assessment. It was established that EASO already has many internal procedures in place, but needs to build further on this.

The IAS visited EASO from 11 to 19 April 2013 for a full risk assessment and a limited review on internal control standards. The IAS will compile its findings in two fact-finding reports and will draw up a strategic internal audit plan for 2014–16.

Following EASO's self-assessment of the implementation of the internal control standards, and following the advance recommendations by the IAS, EASO will strengthen in particular the following internal controls on which it is already working:

- ICS 2. Formalise ethical framework
- ICS 4. Establish framework for yearly staff appraisal and development
- ICS 5. Extended use of performance indicators
- ICS 6. Implement risk management process
- ICS 7. Reinforce EASO's IT governance structure
- ICS 10. Establish a business continuity framework

In order to meet the recommendations of the IAS, EASO will draw up an action plan for implementation.

3.2.2. Conclusions and follow-up of external audit

There are no results from the European Court of Auditors (ECA) of audits performed in 2012 as EASO was financially dependent on the European Commission (DG Home Affairs). The ECA visited EASO from 20 to 24 May 2013 for a first external audit. It compiled its findings in a preliminary audit report on the year 2012.

The ECA considers that the audit evidence obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for its statement of assurance. The ECA's opinion is that EASO's annual accounts present fairly, in all material respects, its financial position as at 31 December 2012. ECA's opinion is that the transactions underlying the annual accounts for the year ended 31 December 2012 are legal and regular in all material respects.

The ECA made several comments with regard to inter alia: a carry-over of EUR 0.2 million which was not covered by a legal commitment and was therefore irregular; 50 payments, representing about 20 % of the total number of payments, which were made after the deadlines set by the financial regulation; a large amount of committed appropriations which have been carried over, representing 65.13 % of total committed appropriations; and that there is room to improve the transparency of recruitment procedures. EASO sent a draft reply to the ECA, and has put immediate action in place for the year 2013 and beyond.

3.3. Building block 3: Follow-up of reservations and action plans for audits from previous years

N/A

4. Declaration of assurance

I, the undersigned,

Executive Director of the European Asylum Support Office,

In my capacity as authorising officer,

For the actions and commitments since EASO's financial independence of 20 September 2012,

Declare that the information contained in this report gives a true and fair view.

State that I have reasonable assurance that the resources assigned to the activities described in this report have been used for their intended purpose and in accordance with the principles of sound financial management, and that the control procedures put in place give the necessary guarantees concerning the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions.

This reasonable assurance is based on my own judgment and on the information at my disposal, such as the results of the self-assessment, *ex post* controls, the observations of the Internal Audit Service and the European Court of Auditors.

Confirm that I am not aware of anything not reported here which could harm the interests of EASO and the institutions in general.

Done in Valletta Harbour on 14 June 2013,

SIGNED on 14 June 2013

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