

External Cooperation Strategy



EUAA External Cooperation Strategy

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Foreword

Nina Gregori, EUAA Executive Director

Supporting the asylum and reception systems of EU+ countries¹ has always been the EUAA's priority. In addition, we have played a small but steadily evolving role in the external dimension of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS).

This evolution is in line with the development of EU policy. Once its links with the internal dimension were recognised, the external dimension of asylum and migration became a strategic priority for the EU – as reflected in the 2020 Pact on Migration and Asylum.

Since the last revision of the EUAA External Cooperation Strategy in 2019, significant events have transformed the global migration landscape. Among others, the Covid-19 pandemic, instances of instrumentalisation of migration, the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, and the EU accession perspectives of Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia. These events have changed the context in which the Agency operates – increasing the relevance of our external actions.

Noteworthy in this regard is the request to facilitate operational cooperation between EU+ countries and Moldova, which led to the first-ever deployment of a small EUAA operational team outside of the EU. In addition, recent Council conclusions have called on the Agency to take on a heightened role in addressing challenges in the external dimension.

Likewise, the EUAA's new Regulation, which entered into force in 2022, has increased our potential in the external dimension. For instance, we are now tasked with encouraging operational cooperation between EU+ countries and third countries, and we can award grants and deploy liaison officers in third countries.

The 2023 revision of the External Cooperation Strategy offers an opportunity to adapt to the above-mentioned global developments and make the best use of the enhanced possibilities of the EUAA Regulation.

The Strategy sets the overall direction for the Agency's future work in the external dimension of the CEAS. It recalibrates the vision, principles, and strategic objectives of our external actions; updates our legal and policy frameworks of reference; and outlines a renewed approach to third-country support, as well as to resettlement and humanitarian admission. It also addresses questions related to funding and human resources; highlights the need to strengthen cooperation and coordination with relevant stakeholders; and points to the way forward for its implementation, monitoring, and revision.

Over the past years, EU+ countries and partner third countries alike have appreciated the EUAA's added value in the external dimension - as a centre of expertise on asylum and reception, a forum for coordination, and a network of contacts. We have developed relationships of mutual trust, cooperation and coordination with international organisations and national administrations in the Western Balkans, Türkiye and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

We are now ready to build on these foundations and to take our external action a step further, always in keeping with the Union's policies and priorities.

¹ EU+ countries include the Member States of the European Union (EU) as well as Schengen associated

countries that have concluded the relevant arrangements for participation in the Agency's work.



1. Methodological note

The EUAA Regulation calls on the Agency's Management Board to adopt a strategy for relations with third countries and international organisations concerning matters for which the Agency is competent.²

The revised External Cooperation Strategy builds on the Agency's significant experience in the areas of third-country support and resettlement, capitalising on past successes and acting on lessons learned. It is also the result of a resource-conscious assessment of current and anticipated needs in third countries, mindful of the priorities among EU+ countries³ in third-country cooperation and resettlement.

The Strategy was revised according to an inclusive and participatory process, and by applying a whole-of-Agency approach. Contributions were provided by several external stakeholders: the European Commission, other JHA agencies, EU+ countries in Council fora and in the Agency's Third Country Cooperation Network and Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Network, partner third countries, partner international organisations, and several individual stakeholders with expertise in the domain of migration and asylum.

² Art 41(1)(ab) of the EUAA Regulation.



2. Vision, Principles and Strategic Objectives



Vision

The EUAA will support the full alignment of candidate and potential candidate countries to the norms and standards of the CEAS and will assist other selected partner third countries in enhancing their asylum and reception systems.

The EUAA will provide Member States with enhanced support in their resettlement, humanitarian admission activities, and complementary pathways for third-country nationals in need of international protection.

Principles

Coherence	Solidarity	Sustainability
In the external dimension, the EUAA acts within the frameworks of EU policies on external relations, protection of fundamental rights, migration, asylum, resettlement, and humanitarian admission. The EUAA coordinates and seeks to draw synergies with all relevant actors on the ground, in a spirit of partnership and complementarity.	EUAA's external cooperation contributes to the EU's solidarity with partner third countries by supporting Member States' resettlement and humanitarian admission schemes and by assisting partner third countries in meeting their obligations under international law towards persons in need of international protection.	Capacity development is a long-term endeavour, whose objective is to contribute to lasting improvement in national systems. Through a project cycle management approach, the EUAA is committed to assisting Member States and partner third countries in developing their capacity not only at the level of individual staff member, but especially at the institutional level.

The Agency works towards its vision in the external dimension by pursuing two strategic objectives in third-country support and two strategic objectives in resettlement and humanitarian admission – as outlined in the table below.



THIRD-COUNTRY SUPPORT

SO 1	Support EU institutions and EU+ countries in the external dimension of the CEAS, in line with the 'Team Europe' approach
O 1.1	The EUAA raises awareness of its mandate and role in the external dimension of the CEAS.
O 1.2	The EUAA facilitates the coordination of EU+ countries' activities through the EUAA Third Country Cooperation Network.
O 1.3	The EUAA provides technical advice on asylum and reception to inform Union programming and to support the European Commission in assessing the progress of candidate and potential candidate countries in aligning with EU norms and standards.
O 1.4	The EUAA promotes cooperation between EU institutions / EU+ countries and third countries, including by participating in the implementation of relevant international agreements and by facilitating capacity development and operational cooperation between EU+ countries and third countries.
SO 2	Strengthen partner third-country legislation and asylum and reception systems
O 2.1	The EUAA develops strong partnerships with third countries through effective, innovative, and rights-based cooperation and dialogue.
O 2.2	The EUAA establishes appropriate regional and national frameworks for cooperation between with partner third countries.
O 2.3	The EUAA delivers support tailored to partner third countries' needs using EUAA's and EU+ countries' expertise, tools, and best practice.
O 2.4	The EUAA takes measures to prepare, where appropriate, candidate and potential candidate countries for participation and gradual integration in EUAA structures.
RESETTLEMENT AND HUMANITARIAN ADMISSION	
SO 3	Offer infrastructure and logistical support to EU+ countries' resettlement and humanitarian admission schemes in selected third countries
O 3.1	The EUAA operates the Resettlement Support Facility (RSF) as a 'one-stop-shop' supporting EU+ countries' resettlement and humanitarian admission operations from Türkiye.
O 3.2	The EUAA to establish flexible outreach services for resettlement and humanitarian admission catering to the needs of EU+ countries in various geographic areas, in line with EU and EUAA priorities.
O 3.3	The EUAA provides additional operational support to EU+ countries' resettlement and humanitarian admission schemes.
SO 4	Facilitate planning, cooperation, coordination, and implementation of actions in the area of Resettlement, Humanitarian Admission, and Community Sponsorship and Complementary Pathways linked to international protection
O 4.1	The EUAA facilitates the coordination of EU+ countries' activities through the EUAA Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Network.
O 4.2	The EUAA strengthens the technical capacity of resettling EU+ countries, including in the field of monitoring and evaluation, information provision in resettlement and humanitarian admission, through thematic exchanges, training, and operational tools for resettlement and humanitarian admission.
O 4.3	The EUAA enhances the capacity and knowledge of partner third countries in the area of resettlement and humanitarian admission.



O 4.4

The EUAA supports EU+ countries with communication campaigns to raise the visibility of resettlement and humanitarian admission activities related to the EU, as appropriate.

3. Legal and policy framework

According to Art. 41 of the EUAA Regulation, the EUAA Management Board must adopt a strategy for relations with third countries and international organisations concerning matters for which the Agency is competent, as well as a working arrangement with the Commission for its implementation.⁴ The Strategy, including related actions and associated resources, must be included in the multi-annual programming of the Agency.⁵

The Agency is tasked with supporting EU+ countries 'in their cooperation with third countries in matters related to the external dimension of the CEAS' and 'with their actions on resettlement'.⁶ These tasks are further detailed in Recitals 14 and 38 and Art. 35 of the EUAA Regulation.

Deploying liaison officers to third countries is a new tool in the Agency's toolbox. The preconditions and process for the deployment of liaison officers to third countries, as well as their tasks, are outlined in Art. 36 of the EUAA Regulation. The EUAA is undertaking the necessary preparatory measures to operationalise these provisions.

In the performance of its tasks, the EUAA guarantees the protection of fundamental rights in accordance with relevant Union law, including the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, and relevant international law, in particular the Geneva Convention relating to

the Status of Refugees of 28 July 1951, as amended by the New York Protocol of 31 January 1967.

When cooperating with third countries, the EUAA acts in accordance with and within the framework of the Union's external policy, including guidance from the European Council. It integrates its external activities in the broader EU strategic cooperation with third countries.

The policy framework of the EUAA's external action is set by European policies and approaches, including the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility, the EU Enlargement Strategy, the Eastern Partnership policy framework, the Valletta Action Plan, the Western Balkans Strategy, the EU-Turkey statement, the Malta Declaration and its Implementation Plan, the EU Action Plans relating to the main migration routes, and all other relevant external action policies and plans.⁷

The Pact on Migration and Asylum, highlighting the inextricable link between the internal and the external dimension, as well as the need to pursue comprehensive, balanced and mutually beneficial partnerships with third countries, represents a key reference document.

The Action Plans adopted by the Working Party on External Aspects of Asylum and Migration (EMWP) and the Action fiches adopted by the operational coordination

⁴ DG HOME and the EUAA have concluded a working arrangement for cooperation on external action in January 2018. The working arrangement remains in place and will be amended by mutual agreements as needed.

⁵ Art. 42 of the EUAA Regulation.

⁶ Art. 2 of the EUAA Regulation.

⁷ The list is non-exhaustive and reflects the state of play at the time of writing (March 2023).



mechanism for the external dimension of migration (MOCADEM) operationalise the overall policy framework and adapt the priorities of the EU to evolving migration contexts and needs.

The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) is also a framework of reference for the Agency at the international level.

Many of the abovementioned policy instruments – such as the EU-Turkey statement – also apply to the area of resettlement and humanitarian admission. Other important policy instruments in this area include the Recommendation on legal pathways to protection in the EU, part of the Pact on Migration and Asylum, and products from the United Nations High Commissioner

for Refugees (UNHCR), such as the *Projected Global Resettlement Needs* and the global strategy titled *Third Country Solutions for Refugees: Roadmap 2030*.

These frameworks are important in the multiannual EU-pledging for resettlement and humanitarian admission. The Union Resettlement Framework Regulation, once adopted, will also add to the role of the EUAA in the area of resettlement and humanitarian admission.

The EUAA External Cooperation Strategy must be read in conjunction with other EUAA thematic strategies, focusing for instance on training and learning, reception, and innovation.





4. Third-country Support

A new relation-centred approach

The previous Strategy defined three geographic priorities, namely the Western Balkans, Türkiye and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. However, the strategy also allowed the Agency to start engagement with other third countries and act upon requests for support when new needs emerged. Indeed, some ad hoc support was rendered to 'new partners' in the Eastern Partnership region addressing some very specific requests (e.g., Georgia). In addition, the Agency explored ways to cooperate with Niger and countries in the Afghanistan region so as to build resilience to the challenges they confront.

Given the fast-evolving global operational environment, an explicit margin of flexibility is necessary to accommodate unforeseen requests for cooperation with third countries with whom the Agency has not previously

cooperated, and to account for the availability of resources.

While continuing to pursue its work with existing partners, the Agency will also consider a response to calls for support and cooperation with third countries and regions whenever new needs arise and EU priorities re-focus. In doing so, it will act within the limits of its resources and with a resource allocation that is proportional to the level of priority given to the country/region concerned. In some cases, this may require a re-prioritisation of resources.

To better define the extent of the support the Agency will provide to partners, this new Strategy sets priorities through a relation-centred, rather than a purely geographic, approach.



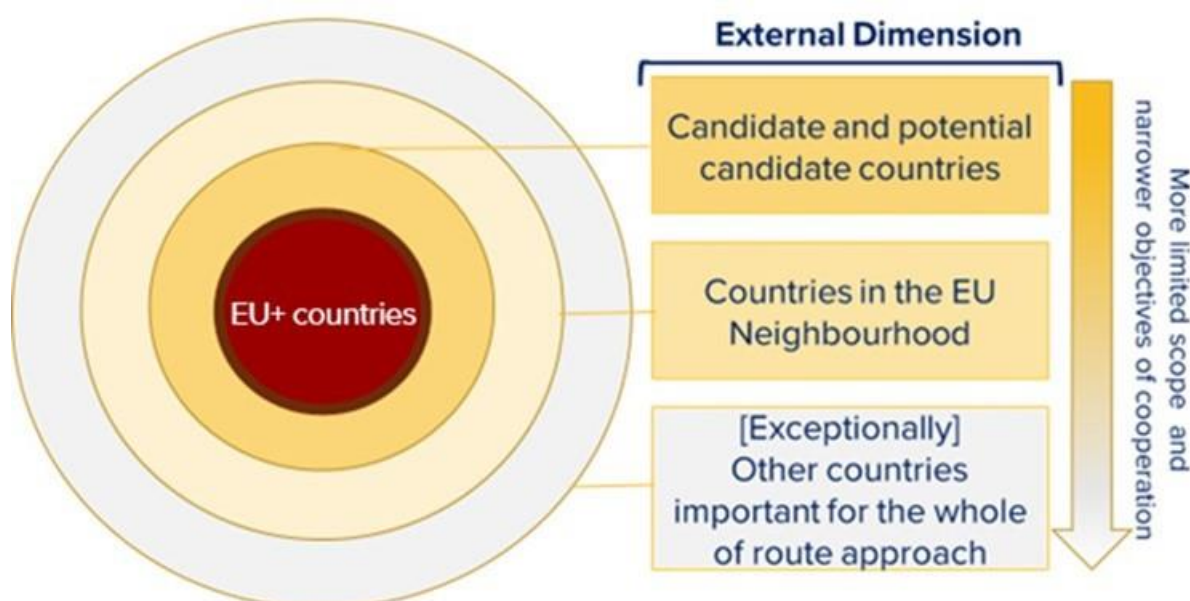


Figure 1 A graphic representation of the relation-centred approach

The 'core' mandate of the Agency lies in the internal dimension. In the external dimension, priority for third-country support is given to candidate and potential candidate countries. This is meant to give increased attention to partner third countries seeking to meet their EU accession goals, in line with the EU external policy.

Subsequently, the Agency will give priority to other European Neighbourhood countries, and finally, to countries outside the Neighbourhood that are also important in achieving a 'whole-of-route' approach. This support will have a more limited scope and its objectives will be different.

Situations of a serious character may prompt calls on the Agency to render support to third countries with whom it has not previously engaged.

Within the abovementioned priority setting, the activation of support to new partner countries, be it accession countries or others, will be considered on a case-by-case basis, depending on:

- EU external policy, commitments, and requests (including in Council conclusions; Working Party on

External Aspects of Migration (EMWP) 'Action Plans for strengthening comprehensive migration partnerships with priority countries of origin and transit' to operationalise the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum; and action fiches prepared by the Operational Coordination Mechanism for the External Dimension of Migration (MOCADDEM);

- Prior cooperation with EUAA;
- Requests by third countries and joint needs assessment;
- Availability of resources.

Needs-based support

As has been the case in the Agency's previous strategies for support to third countries, a needs-based approach will remain at the heart of the intervention logic.

The Agency's engagement will follow a project cycle management methodology. This includes carrying out needs and/or feasibility assessments in cooperation with EU+ countries, the European Commission, the EU Delegations, and relevant international organisations as appropriate. Most importantly, assessments are conducted

jointly with the third-country administration in order to increase national ownership. The scope of the needs assessment varies depending on whether there was prior cooperation with the country. Such assessment will be undertaken applying three complementary approaches: normative, needs based and demand driven. It is adapted to the level and type of support to be provided. The assessment will also take into account the absorption capacity of national authorities for any potential support.

The Agency will also consult the Third Country Cooperation Network and other relevant stakeholders, through its regular meetings and exchange of information. Relevant in-house data and reports will be taken into account before engagement. In addition, any relevant reports by EU+ countries, third countries, EU institutions and agencies, International Organisations and civil society organisations can also be used to pre-assess the need and appropriateness of potential action by the Agency.

Finally, decisions on the Agency's engagement, upscaling of engagement, or disengagement are taken in consultation with the European Commission and the EUAA Management Board, and are endorsed through the adoption of strategic programming documents by the latter.

The Agency's response is then formulated, planned, and structured by means of the cooperation instruments at its disposal, and subsequently implemented, monitored, and evaluated. The Management Board will remain informed of progress in the implementation of activities through the Agency's reporting tools, and with specific updates, as appropriate.

Towards a new, holistic approach

A catalogue with the different types of support interventions which the EUAA can

offer to third countries will be developed to accompany this strategy. Such a 'catalogue of external action services' contributes to a comprehensive, yet flexible approach whereby activities can be easily adapted according to a set of support modalities. This facilitates a swift response to a potentially rapidly evolving situation on the ground. The catalogue will also serve as a foundation for the engagement process and the design of cooperation instruments. However, it does not replace a thorough needs assessment phase, which is also important in clarifying expectations, possible limitations of the support, and pre-conditions for the process.

For each thematic area in which a country needs support, the Agency will aim at offering truly holistic support. A 'thematic package' will be compiled using the aforementioned 'catalogue of external action services'.

The Agency will support the establishment and strengthening of the asylum and reception systems of partner third countries by delivering capacity development support. Whereas the type of activities in a support package and their thematic scope will depend on the operational context, the outcome of a needs assessment, and resource availability, the scope will generally be broader for candidate and potential candidate countries.

A package will consist of activities aimed at knowledge sharing on practices, the dissemination of guidance and tools on the given theme coupled, as appropriate, with the provision of information session(s) on the EUAA products and their intended use, and/or training in the relevant thematic area of the European Asylum Curriculum.

As appropriate, the Agency will include elements of a more practical, 'operational' nature in the package. It may focus more on institutional development – hand in hand with the national authorities. This may include the joint development of SOPs, workshops, or other learning activities aimed at demonstrating the implementation of support tools or enhanced procedures and supporting their roll-out. Study visits and expert missions



to EU+ countries for officials from partner third countries will also help to strengthen existing capacities and institutions. The Agency will also facilitate participation of Western Balkan partners in selected EU network meetings.

In the initial cooperation phase, non-accession countries may be offered a more limited package, such as access to the foundation modules of the European Asylum Curriculum. Translation of those modules and delivery of others may be considered in a second phase.

A 'Whole-of-Agency' effort

Given the afore-described 'package' approach, achieving the objectives of this Strategy will require the Agency to deploy a 'whole-of-Agency' effort. The implementation draws on resources and relies on knowledge and expertise from across the Agency. The Agency's Asylum Knowledge Centre contributes to the Agency's efforts in third countries by extending to the third countries the practical guides, tools and technical advice on asylum and reception designed for EU+ countries. The Training and Professional Development Centre contributes with complementary support. It sends expert trainers to roll-out training in the relevant European Asylum Curriculum training modules in third countries. Where required, operational cooperation is facilitated by the Operations Centre as this centre holds the Agency's field expertise.

While led by a dedicated Unit/Sector, the implementation of third-country support is a joint effort of the whole agency. The three abovementioned centres have their staff dedicated in the first place to supporting EU+ countries. Therefore, strategic programming of third-country support must be within the limits of the support capabilities of the different centres.

Adapting support modalities to the specific context

The extent to which the Agency will tailor its support in accordance with the identified needs and interests of the partner country, depends on the resources available, bearing in mind the above-described 'whole-of-agency' effort. In some cases, it may not be possible to adapt EUAA products to the specific context of a partner country.

Distinctions in the type and thematic scope of support, and cooperation frameworks will be made applying a differentiated approach, depending on the specific partner country and the priority given in line with the Agency's implementation framework. In this sense, the Agency will design its interventions considering the different strategic objectives it has in the different regions, along with considerations concerning the needs and interests of the country.

Whereas the strategic objective of support in countries in the European Neighbourhood is to strengthen the protection space and raise standards, in candidate and potential candidate countries the support goes one step further. It is geared towards preparing the competent authorities for the future participation in the CEAS. The EUAA aims to support the alignment of national legal frameworks of migration and asylum, as well as their practical application, with the CEAS. Achieving this convergence is needed to meet the criteria under 'Chapter 24 - Justice, Freedom and Security' and making progress towards EU integration.

In the countries outside the European Neighbourhood (referred to in this document as 'whole-of-route' countries), the Agency will also aim at strengthening the protection space but will do so only in relevant niche areas where the Agency can provide added value as a small player with unique expertise.



Regardless of the partner country, the Agency's strength and the added value of its cooperation lies in bringing the EU perspective and in providing knowledge about the EU acquis and European standards. In addition, the Agency is best-placed to facilitate peer-to-peer exchange of information with EU experts (in-house or provided by EU+ countries) on EU best practices in asylum and reception. In this sense, it complements the mandate and work of International Organisations specialised in migration and asylum.

Addressing requests to facilitate EU+ countries' operational engagement

In 2022, the Agency gained a first experience in facilitating operational cooperation between EU+ countries and a third country, as it deployed a team to Moldova to support through information provision the transfer of displaced persons from Moldova to volunteering EU+ countries. In the future, the Agency can draw on this positive first experience, while adapting its approach to the specific new context. In line with the relation-centred approach, the possibility of facilitating operational cooperation will be reserved for candidate and potential candidate countries.

In this respect, various avenues will be explored: for instance, where EU+ countries are willing to procure and/or finance the provision of asylum or reception-related equipment to third countries, the EUAA could support with common technical specifications and related training/guidance.

Our cooperation instruments

In order to meet its external action objectives, the EUAA will strive to make the best use of the instruments at its disposal. The EUAA will use the most appropriate instrument to plan, structure and deliver its support. Allowing for a margin of flexibility, the choice of instrument will depend on whether a partner

country is an accession country, an EU neighbourhood country or a 'whole-of-route' country.

The cooperation instruments at the Agency's disposal to implement third-country activities include: ad hoc interventions, Projects, Roadmaps for bilateral cooperation, liaison officers and Working Arrangements.

Whereas Roadmaps and Projects will be the instruments for cooperation with accession countries and EU neighbourhood countries, they are not excluded as cooperation instruments for 'whole-of-route' countries.

More often, the EUAA will opt for 'lighter' forms of cooperation with 'whole-of-route' countries, which consist of targeted interventions of a more ad hoc nature, aimed at addressing specific gaps.

Where possible, the Agency will intervene by joining existing processes of other actors and working under wider frameworks rather than starting small-scale capacity development initiatives on its own (e.g., Team Europe Initiatives, Migration Dialogues/Processes, UNHCR Asylum Capacity Support Group support initiatives, and cooperation with the International Centre for Migration Policy Development -ICMPD- on training in the context of the Migration Capacity Partnership for the Mediterranean).

Roadmaps, Projects, and ad hoc interventions will be officially endorsed and formalised by means of an exchange of letters at the appropriate level of the beneficiary country and the Agency. The possibility of concluding Working Arrangements will continue to be explored as a sign of the intensification of the Agency's partnership with certain partner countries.

Framing the cooperation with a country under a working arrangement could become particularly relevant where the Agency will

deploy a liaison officer. Such cooperation frameworks express the highest level of commitment to long-term cooperation with a third country.

Liaison officers

The EUAA mandate provides the Agency with new opportunities for maintaining and enhancing its relationships with third countries, as it allows the Agency to establish an enhanced presence in third countries, including through the deployment of liaison officers. Acting as an interface with national authorities, they will facilitate communication and information flows and build and maintain effective relationships and coordination mechanisms with the competent authorities and key actors on the ground. In particular, they will coordinate closely with EU Delegations, international organisations and, where appropriate, other relevant stakeholders on the ground.

Criteria established by the EUAA Regulation will determine the countries where a liaison officer will be deployed. They include the compliance of the country's asylum and migration management practices with non-derogable human rights standards, the situation of asylum in the third country, and the impact on the asylum situation in the EU. In addition, the Agency's proposals to deploy liaison officers will be in line with the prioritisation of countries/regions as per the relation-centred approach. The Agency will also take into account the possible presence of other actors on the ground including European Migration Liaison Officers (EMLOs), other JHA Agencies Liaison Officers, and International Organisations offices; along with the security situation in the third country.

Wherever possible, Liaison Officers should be hosted in EU Delegation premises.

Integrating candidate and potential candidate countries in EUAA structures

One of the ways in which the EUAA can aim at bringing standards and practices in asylum and reception in candidate and potential candidate countries closely aligned to those of the EU, is by gradually involving them in existing EUAA structures.

This approach will initially be limited to Western Balkan candidate and potential candidate countries. EUAA responds in this regard to various communications from the Commission and European Council Conclusions.⁸ This will allow Western Balkan partners to benefit from the peer-to-peer information exchange between MS and where appropriate, allow their involvement in the development of EUAA products which they are already using or will be requested to use once a member of the EU. At the same time, EU+ countries could also benefit from information exchange, warranted by the close interdependence of the internal and external dimensions of the CEAS. Specifically, the EU+ countries could benefit from their contribution to the Information & Documentation System, once this becomes public.

This initiative of gradual integration has already started with some Western Balkan partners participating in some of the EUAA's networks. The EUAA will explore the added value of WB participation in each EUAA network and which approach is best suited, taking into account any concerns, in particular related to sensitivity of data and information. It will determine whether a differentiated

⁸ The 2018 communication of the European Commission on 'a credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans' (COM/2018/065) called for 'relevant EU internal policies to be further extended to the Western Balkans', to 'step up strategic and operational cooperation with the Western Balkans on migration', and to 'further integrate the Western Balkans into existing EU knowledge

networks'. In addition, the European Council conclusions on 23 June 2022 invited all relevant actors to 'further advance the gradual integration between the European Union and the region already during the enlargement process itself in a reversible and merit-based manner'.

approach will need to be adopted for different partners and different networks – with an initial focus on those most relevant and suitable for integration.

Where official Terms of Reference of the relevant EUAA networks exist, they may require amendment according to the respective procedures. While the Agency will encourage networks to offer the widest possible integration, including, as appropriate, in network steering meetings,

Other than exploring participation in EUAA structures, the EUAA will continue to promote intra-regional cooperation and the establishment of regional networks (such as the regional Western Balkans COI network). At the same time, the appropriateness of interactions between regional Western Balkan practitioners' networks and existing EUAA coordination platforms, for instance through the organisation of joint sessions, will be explored.



5. Resettlement and humanitarian admission

Operational support

The Resettlement Support Facility (RSF) in Istanbul

For the foreseeable future, Türkiye will remain a priority country for many resettling EU+ countries – also because of the EU-Turkey Statement. That is why the EUAA will continue to support EU+ countries through the RSF. In 2021, after the positive evaluation of the RSF pilot phase (2019-2021), the Agency signed a new four-year framework contract with the Jesuit Refugee Services Croatia and its partner, the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC). Therefore, the EUAA will continue to coordinate the delivery of services at the RSF, working closely with a growing number of EU+ countries to support the implementation of their commitments towards resettlement and humanitarian admission and to facilitate increased legal migration solutions for refugees.

The RSF is a one-stop-shop solution for EU+ countries carrying out resettlement and humanitarian admission operations from Türkiye. It caters for selection missions, interviews, cultural orientation, or pre-departure orientation missions – in a face-to-face, hybrid, or remote modality. It offers services such as scheduling, interpretation, information provision, arranging accommodation and meals for refugees, childcare, IT support, medical assessment, etc. The ambition is to handle the majority of the logistic challenges linked to an EU+ country mission, so that EU+ countries' operational experts can focus on their core tasks. The set-up of the services can be adapted to the different needs, requests, and procedures of EU+ countries, and can be scaled up and down.



The outreach services approach

The added value of the RSF is widely acknowledged and greatly appreciated by EU+ countries.

That is why, immediately after the pilot phase, the EUAA and EU+ countries have engaged in discussions about the possible “replicability” of the RSF concept. The conclusion is that, to address the operational needs of EU+ countries outside the scope of Türkiye, the Agency needs a level of flexibility that cannot be guaranteed by just replicating the RSF model. A conceptual evolution is needed.

Outside of Türkiye, EU+ countries resettle from a variety of third countries - with far smaller numbers and different national priorities, based on or in addition to EU priorities and UNHCR’s global resettlement needs. The choice of priority countries to resettle from is heavily influenced by internal and external political developments, as reflected in the EU pledging process. All these variables make it difficult to carry out predictable planning and to justify long-term investments in a single country other than Türkiye.

The Agency’s proposal is to adopt an outreach service approach, to support EU+ countries in multiple third countries – rather than in just one other location outside of Türkiye. This will maximise the agility and flexibility of EUAA’s support and will enable the Agency to accommodate for the fast-evolving needs of EU+ countries in a wider geographical global scope.

The Agency aims to conclude targeted framework contracts to offer in multiple third countries a range of services comparable to those delivered by the RSF in Istanbul.

Rather than having a permanent physical facility in one country, such framework

contracts would allow for the provision of temporary support with the relevant services, for the time needed. Depending on local conditions, such temporary support might be delivered in premises operated by a variety of actors: the EU, EU+ countries, international organisations, civil society organisations, or private entities. Such premises would need to adhere to relevant EU norms and standards.

Coordination support

Since its establishment in January 2020, the Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Network has become the forum of reference for EU+ countries engaged or interested in resettlement and humanitarian admission schemes.

The aim of the Network is to facilitate and increase operational cooperation and coordination between national authorities of EU+ countries and relevant actors, at both strategic and operational level related to resettlement and humanitarian admission.

The Network has proved to be a flexible instrument: specific working groups have been set up under its umbrella to push forward conceptual and operational developments in certain key areas, such as community sponsorship and resettlement-related information provision and monitoring and evaluation in resettlement.

The launch of the Expert Platform on safe pathways for Afghans in October 2021 proves the vitality and adaptability of the Network. The Expert Platform aims, as long as relevant, to ensure European and global coordination on efforts in providing and enhancing legal and safe channels for vulnerable Afghans in need of international protection. Participants include EU+ countries, Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America, as well as UNHCR, the International



Organisation for Migration (IOM), ICMPD, and other relevant stakeholders.

Upon request by EU+ countries, and in coordination with the EU Delegations in third countries, the Network and specifically the EUAA could also facilitate dialogues with third countries on practical issues impacting the implementation of resettlement and humanitarian admission (such as the availability of travel documents or exit permits).

Alongside the Network activities, the EUAA continues to work closely with its partners through EU and global fora such as the high-level Resettlement Forum, the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement, and the Priority Situations Core Group. The EUAA also follows discussions on complementary pathways linked to international protection, with a view to consider potential support within the Agency's mandate. Close contact and coordination with UNHCR and IOM are facilitated through quarterly tripartite meetings. Other partners such as the ICMC, the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI) and the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) are also engaged frequently, as well as civil society in general through EUAA's Consultative Forum.

Capacity development

The EUAA will continue to create and deliver capacity development tools, training and activities related to resettlement and humanitarian admission, where EU+ countries are the main beneficiary.

The EUAA can support the design and setting up of resettlement and humanitarian admissions programmes, in cases that such programmes do not already exist or need to

be amended, including necessary pilot phases, or organisational change management plans required to implement such programmes. The EUAA also supports EU+ countries with specific resettlement training and a diversity of tools to implement resettlement and humanitarian admission programmes in an effective and efficient manner. For instance, the EUAA resettlement operational tools⁹ are meant to cover areas such as information provision and the organisation of selection missions and transfers.

As part of its European Asylum Curriculum, the EUAA can deliver comprehensive training on resettlement, providing practitioners with insights into what resettlement and humanitarian admission entails, who it is for, and how it can be organised and delivered in practice. The EUAA is also committed to expand its training offer on practical issues related to the various phases of the resettlement process.

Depending on needs and interests, the Agency will provide capacity development assistance also to partner third countries to increase knowledge and understanding on the resettlement and humanitarian admission programs.

Communication

The EUAA's contributions to the EU-wide communication campaign targeting people fleeing from Russia's invasion of Ukraine showcased the Agency's ability to reach out to and communicate effectively with target groups. The Agency has also developed a dedicated methodology for information provision, under the 'Let's Speak Asylum

⁹ Originally developed within the framework of the project Facilitating Resettlement and Refugee Admission through New Knowledge (EU-FRANK).





Project' with a specific focus on resettlement and humanitarian admission.

Considering its growing expertise in this area, EU+ countries have asked the EUAA to assist with awareness raising and communication campaigns aimed at promoting the visibility of

EU resettlement and humanitarian admission programmes. The EUAA will explore with interested EU+ countries avenues to share resettled refugees' stories and develop information materials on resettlement and humanitarian admission.





6. Funding and human resources

As the 'core' mandate of the EUAA lies in the internal dimension, a very small fraction of the EUAA budget and human resources have been devoted directly to the external dimension. The expanded mandate of the EUAA and the increasing requests for support by EU+ countries are also continuing to build up pressure on the limited resources of the Agency. For these reasons, support to third countries is increasingly dependent on external funding.¹⁰ Since 2016, the EUAA has been benefitting from funding from the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), aimed at supporting Western Balkan partners in their efforts to align asylum and reception systems to the standards of the CEAS. The EUAA has also benefitted from voluntary financial contributions from EU+ countries to support its work in North Africa.

Conscious that the limitation on resources is likely to continue for the foreseeable future, and in addition to efforts to flexibly reallocate resources as necessary, the EUAA will continue its endeavours to secure funding from relevant EU funds and from EU+ countries.

Aside from IPA, funding under the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) -Global Europe will be sought, possibly in cooperation with relevant partners (e.g., ICMPD, UNHCR), in order to enable the Agency to support countries in other regions, such as new candidate and potential candidate countries not yet covered by IPA and the Southern Neighbourhood.

As suggested by EU+ countries, the Agency will also explore avenues to improve information and knowledge exchange between its networks and the IPA and NDICI committees, to avoid duplication of efforts and ensure complementarity of actions among relevant stakeholders. The expertise and technical advice of the Agency could prove precious, especially in the programming and planning phase of asylum- and reception-related interventions.

Further EU+ countries financial voluntary contributions could be gathered under the framework of the Voluntary Solidarity Mechanism (VSM).¹¹ EU+ countries choosing to implement alternative measures of solidarity could for instance finance EUAA projects in third countries, if in line with the needs identified. According to the Declaration on the VSM, lessons learned from its implementation will inform negotiations on the permanent solidarity mechanism that will be included in the Asylum and Migration Management Regulation. Importantly, for external funding to serve its purpose, it will need to be possible to hire project staff using part of that funding.

The new EUAA mandate introduces the possibility for the Agency to award grants. As appropriate, and once the Agency has developed the required framework for awarding and managing such grants, they will be taken into consideration as an option for delivering support related to third-country capacity development, resettlement, and humanitarian admission.

¹⁰ In line with Art. 35(5) of the EUAA Regulation: 'The Agency may benefit from Union funding in accordance with the provisions of the relevant instruments supporting the Union's external policy'.

¹¹ The Solidarity Declaration agreed on 22 June 2022 provides a voluntary and temporary solidarity mechanism for one year, offering an opportunity for lessons learned and bridging towards the future permanent system under the Pact.





7. Cooperation and coordination with stakeholders

Cooperating with EU+ countries

EU+ countries are at heart of the Agency. They are represented both in the Management Board, which gives general orientation for all the Agency's activities and ensures the Agency performs its tasks, and in the Agency's thematic networks.

The Third Country Cooperation Network and the Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Network, as well as their geographic and thematic Working Groups, are the primary vessels to enhance coordination among EU+ countries, partner third countries, and relevant organisations. Enhancing coordination in the Networks prevents duplication of efforts and enables complementarity in external actions. Coordination tools include the Projects Database, meant to provide an overview of asylum- and reception-related projects being

planned or implemented in third countries, and mapping exercises as appropriate.

Furthermore, the EUAA has adopted and strives to implement in practice the '*Team Europe*' approach in all its actions related to resettlement and support to partner third countries.

Cooperation with EU+ countries is essential for the delivery of EUAA actions in the external dimension. Any expansion of the EUAA support in the external dimension will depend in part on increased engagement of EU+ countries. They provide in-kind and financial assistance, as well as technical expertise. Partner countries benefit greatly from peer-to-peer practical exchanges organised and moderated by the EUAA.



Cooperating with EU institutions, bodies, and agencies

In planning and implementing its external action, the EUAA will cooperate closely with the European Commission, in particular with DG HOME, in line with the working arrangement between the Agency and DG HOME for cooperation on external action (Article 41(1)(ab)).

In addition, in accordance with the Regulation (Art.35(1),(2)) and its Working Arrangement with the European External Action Service (EEAS), the Agency will cooperate with third-country authorities with the support of and in coordination with the EEAS and Union Delegations. Through the deployment of project staff and/or liaison officers in third countries, co-located in the premises of Delegations, the Agency will step up its cooperation and consultation with the Delegations.

The Agency will also work closely with DG NEAR, DG INTPA, and other JHA Agencies.

The Agency will follow developments in the EU's agenda, promote its work, added value, and achievements with its EU stakeholders, and, where needed, raise awareness of its challenges. To this end, it will participate, whenever invited, in strategic and operational fora in Brussels. These include but are not limited to the Working Party on External Aspects of Asylum and Migration (EMWP), the Operational Coordination Mechanism for the External Dimension of Migration (MOCADDEM) and in EU Migration dialogues.

Cooperating with international organisations and civil society

In addition to EU+ countries and EU institutions, the EUAA coordinates its external action with international organisations, in accordance with its duty to cooperate in good faith and exchange information. The relevant

international organisations include but are not limited to UNHCR, IOM, ICMPD, the Intergovernmental Consultations on Migration, Asylum and Refugees (IGC), the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI), and the Joint Coordination Platform (JCP). Building relationships with international organisations is mutually beneficial. While the international organisations may benefit from the Agency's EU-specific expertise, the Agency may benefit from the international organisations' global expertise and networks. The EUAA will also coordinate with civil society organisations and local communities, where appropriate.

The Agency will seek transparent and continuous dialogue with international organisations active in the third countries where the Agency is active or plans to engage. Mutual exchange of information and coordination is pivotal to ensuring complementarity of our interventions and ensuring our support would add value and does not duplicate the efforts of other actors. It allows for exploiting synergies with complementary activities of other actors, and where appropriate, joining each other's efforts. Ultimately, this will allow all relevant actors to achieve a coordinated and comprehensive response in reaching common objectives in the countries concerned. The Agency will encourage its partners to cooperate in a spirit of reciprocity at all times.

The way in which the Agency plans to cooperate and coordinate in the areas of third-country support and resettlement with international organisations, in particular with the UNHCR, within their respective mandates, is set out by its Regulation. Where the level of cooperation requires it and in line with the EUAA Regulation (Art.38), the Agency will conclude, or update when necessary, Exchange of Letters and Working Arrangements with the international



organisations. Working Arrangements will be decided upon by the Agency's Management Board after prior approval by the European Commission. The Agency will implement these cooperation agreements, while regularly taking stock and evaluating the need to update them.

Some specific activities are cross-cutting for the relations with all international organisations. For instance, the Agency will share information and raise awareness of its work in partner third countries. The Agency will participate in international organisations' meetings and as appropriate, invite them to its own coordination platforms to exchange information and expertise. It will set up regular meetings to discuss joint activities. Whenever there is insufficient clarity on roles or responsibilities, discussions will be held in

order to avoid duplication of efforts and ensure respective efforts are complementary. The UNHCR has some specific roles to play as outlined in the EUAA Regulation. To this end, the Agency will continue its dialogue with the UNHCR on the operationalisation of the new mandate.

For its efforts in 'whole-of-route' countries and in the area of resettlement and humanitarian admission, the Agency may also as appropriate consult other international partners such as the so-called '*M5 countries*' (Australia, Canada, the US, the UK, New Zealand), in order to avoid duplication of efforts. This will be facilitated through the cooperation with the IGC. The Agency may also seek to draw synergies and undertake actions in partnership with these countries.



8. Planning and Revision

The present Strategy has no fixed duration because it is intended to further elaborate the framework for the implementation of the Agency's mandate in the external dimension.

Once a year, the EUAA Management Board will discuss the implementation of the Agency's external dimension work and assess its impact in terms of strategic objectives as set out in the present strategy. On this occasion, the Agency will also present a one-year Work Plan to further detail its plans for the following year.

The objectives of both the Strategy and the Work Plan will be reflected in the EUAA internal planning cycle, through the Agency's Single Programming Document.

The specific frameworks for cooperation (projects, roadmaps, etc.) will follow the EUAA monitoring and evaluation framework – as adapted for initiatives in the external dimension.

This Strategy has been drafted to be future-proof. It should be flexible enough to adapt to unforeseen developments and challenges. Nonetheless, its revision might be triggered for instance by:

- The adoption of new legislative instruments significantly altering the mandate of the Agency in the external dimension;
- Systemic changes in the international migration and asylum context impacting EU+ countries and EU priorities.



