

EPRA Final Conference

Reception Authorities' Common Challenges in Perspective

Balancing between
Flexibility, Efficiency and
Quality Objectives in a
European Context

CONFERENCE REPORT

4.12.2018 | Brussels

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A. Introduction and agenda

The **European Platform of Reception Agencies** (EPRA) was created in 2011 under the initiative of the Belgian Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (Fedasil) and a number of other reception agencies in Europe. The need for a platform resulted from the observation that EU reception administrations were confronted with very similar challenges related to the day-to-day management of a reception network. Yet strategic management choices with regards to the implementation of a (national or EU) reception policy can sometimes be made with a limited consideration for and a limited knowledge of similar developments elsewhere in Europe.

The objective of a platform of administrations responsible for the implementation of EU and national reception laws was to **stimulate strategic information sharing on a senior management level, compilation of information, identification and monitoring of best practices**, with a view to reinforcing efficient and informed management of reception in Europe.

The platform has been supported by **EU funding**: initially the European Refugee Fund and later the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund.

In March 2016, in the wake of the European Agenda on Migration (2015), the **European Asylum Support Office** (EASO) launched a new **Network of Reception Authorities**. Mid-2016, in order to formalise and reinforce the existing cooperation and synergies between EPRA and EASO, and in order to lay the basis for a smooth hand-over of EPRA activities to EASO, a **transition period (2016-2018)** during which activities would be organised jointly was agreed upon.

The objective of the **EPRA final conference**, organised in cooperation with EASO, was to **wrap up the activities implemented since EPRA's creation in 2011 and to disseminate the results of the platform to a wider audience** while focusing on current challenges of EU reception administrations and EU cooperation on reception through the EASO Reception network. It was also a perfect opportunity to **officially close the EPRA platform as it stands now and officially hand its results over to EASO**.

The final conference was divided into **4 sessions**:

- An **introductory session**, opened jointly by EPRA and EASO opened the discussions of the day with high level presentations about the current situation of migration, asylum and reception in the EU. A variety of key actors shared their observations based on the latest developments, the current situation and the possible way forward.
- During the **high level panel discussion on reception**, representatives of reception authorities in the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, France, Belgium and Spain, shared their strategic considerations and experiences on the challenges that **reception authorities** are facing in an evolving perspective and exchange on how the developments both at national (e.g. national reception trends and policy developments) and European level (e.g. considered internal or external solidarity measures) may redefine their **strategic priorities and role**. The session was moderated by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI).



- The **thematic session**, after an initial wrap-up of EPRA activities organised since its creation in 2011, interactively addressed more **technical** reception aspects. Country representatives from Sweden, Norway, Austria and Belgium presented specific challenges and responses regarding the three tenets of an effective reception system, namely: **chain management, flexibility and quality**. The session was jointly moderated by EPRA and EASO.

- During the closing session, Fedasil and EASO summarised the **main points of discussion and future perspectives regarding cooperation on reception**, including through the EASO Network of Reception Authorities.

It was attended by about 100 participants, from EU and international organisations, national reception authorities, CSOs, reception partners, Fedasil staff (cf. annexes).

The agenda was as follows:

8.30 – 9.00 **Registration**

9.00 – 10.30 **Introductory session**

The session was opened by Mr Michael Kegels, EPRA Chair, Fedasil, Belgium and Mr Jamil Addou, EASO Executive Director a.i.

This session aims at opening the discussions of the day with high level presentations about the current situation of migration, asylum and reception in the EU. A variety of key actors will share their observations based on the latest developments, the current situation and the possible way forward.

Keynote speakers:

- **Mr Theo Francken**, Belgian State Secretary for Asylum Policy and Migration with responsibility for Administrative Simplification
- **Mr Simon Mordue**, Deputy Director-General Directorate-General Migration and Home Affairs, European Commission
- **Mr Vargas Llosa**, UNHCR Regional Representative for EU Affairs
- **Mr Denis Haveaux**, Director, Red Cross EU Office

This session was moderated by Mrs Ilse De Vis.

10.30 – 11.00 **Coffee break**

11.00 – 12.30 **High level panel discussion: Reception authorities' current challenges and role in an evolving perspective**

The objective of this session is to share strategic considerations and experiences on the challenges that reception authorities are facing in an evolving perspective and exchange on how the developments both at national (e.g. national reception trends and policy developments) and European level (reinforced external border management and considered internal or external solidarity measures) may redefine their strategic priorities and role. Confirmed speakers include so far:

- **Mrs Mirjam Schuit**, Unit Manager, Central Reception Agency, The Netherlands
- **Mr Pavel Bacík**, Director, Refugee Facilities Administration of the Ministry of the Interior, The Czech Republic
- **Mrs Virginie Lasserre**, Head of Reception of asylum seekers and refugees Department, Direction of Asylum, General Directorate for Aliens, Ministry of the Interior, France
- **Mrs Fanny François**, Director Policy Support, Fedasil, Belgium
- **Mrs Dña Amapola Blasco**, Deputy Director for International Protection Programmes, Ministry of Labour, Migration and Social Security, Spain.

This session was moderated by Dr Hanne Beirens, Associate Director at Migration Policy Institute Europe.

12.30 – 13.30 **Lunch**

13.30 – 15.00 **Thematic session on reception**

This session, after a first wrap-up of EPRA activities organised since its creation in 2011, will interactively address more technical aspects/themes of the reception. Country representatives will present specific challenges and responses regarding the three tenets of an effective reception system, namely: flexibility, efficiency and quality.

Speakers include:

- **Chain management**
 - **Mr Björn Bergström**, Specialist, Swedish Migration Agency, Sweden
- **Reception flexibility**
 - **Mr Masoud Safavifard**, Senior Adviser, Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, Norway
- **Reception quality monitoring**
 - **Mrs Maria Pollhammer** and **Mrs Anamaria Sipos**, Reception experts, Basic and Federal Care, Federal Ministry of the Interior, Austria
 - Intervention by **Mrs Sofie De Bisschop**, Head of the Quality unit, Fedasil, Belgium

This session was moderated by Mrs Vinciane Masurelle, Head International Relations Fedasil, EPRA and Mr Geert Knockaert, Reception Officer, EASO.

15.00 – 15.30 **Coffee break**

15.30 – 16.00 **Closing words**

Mr Jean-Pierre Luxen, Fedasil Director General and Mr Jamil Addou, EASO Executive Director a.i. will close the meeting by summarizing main points of discussion and future perspectives. This moment will also be the opportunity to close the EPRA platform as it stands now and hand its results over to EASO.

16.00 – 17.30 **Cocktail Reception**

B. Introductory session

1. Mr. Theo Francken, Belgian State Secretary for Asylum Policy and Migration with responsibility for Administrative Simplification

Mr. Michael Kegels, as Fedasil's Director of Operations and EPRA Chair, opened the day, welcomed all the participants and introduced the first speaker, Mr. Theo Francken.

Mr. Theo Francken underlined the important role played by Fedasil within EPRA and the need to support EASO and collaboration between EU Member States (EU MS). He expressed concerns about the situation in Greece and his will to maintain dialogue with and support to his Greek counterparts. According to Mr. Francken, EU MS have started building functional reception systems. Applicants are not left on their own anymore. The establishment of a decent reception capacity in all member states is important for applicants but also for Europe since it is necessary to ensure the Dublin regulation can be implemented. The Strasbourg case *MSS vs Belgium* transformed Greece in a transit country. Mr. Francken advocated for a shift from a passive to an active model of migration, in which asylum requests are not filed after illegal entry but organised via humanitarian visas or other legal pathways. A shift for such model, he said, would see the reception networks being reduced. Because resettled refugees would be rapidly integrated into the regular housing market. Mr. Francken believes the current situation is breaking the EU solidarity and the model he defends the only option to maintain public support. He suggests that experience acquired by reception authorities such as Fedasil should be used to support the countries hosting refugees and the

UNHCR, once the shift to active migration management and scaling down of reception capacity has been achieved.

2. Opening of the session by Mr. Michael Kegels, EPRA Chair and Fedasil's Director of Operations, and Mr. Jamil Addou, EASO's Executive Director ad interim

Mr. Michael Kegels recalled the context in which EPRA was created, when EASO did not exist and, he said, reception was considered as a secondary topic. At the time, ENARO, managed by COA, offered the possibility for practitioners to learn from each other but did not offer a concertation mechanism at a higher level, where relevant themes chosen by the reception authorities would be addressed and innovative ideas would be developed and shared. Today, migration has become a very important topic on the agenda and reception a key element of migration, whose potential impact on the functioning of the CEAS has been recognised. According to Mr. Kegels, reception has changed over time: the target group has changed – the number of applicants with high recognition rate has increased in most EU+ States – and this has led reception authorities to invest more in integration measures and collaboration with municipalities, the idea that migration and thus reception are predictable and can be controlled has gained ground – reception authorities are expected to increase their monitoring and contingency capacities, the growing engagement of reception authorities for resettlement means that



their mandate starts even before arrival: planning and management of departures, early screening in the countries of origin, cultural orientation programmes, etc. Finally, Mr. Kegels repeated Fedasil's will to continue working with EASO and invest in international cooperation.

Mr. Jamil Addou referred to the changes brought in the field of reception by the European agenda for migration and praised the very positive reaction of EU+ MS. Resources were invested in a dedicated reception team, a network focused on reception, operational support in some MS, etc. EASO is now involved in many activities related to reception: strategic meetings, practical tools, common standards and exchange programmes. It has been working hand in hand with EPRA since 2016 and this helped prevent a waste of knowledge and duplication of costs. According to Mr. Addou, reception authorities face common challenges and it remains essential to discuss these challenges and the solutions developed to cope with them. He closed his speech by thanking the speakers and expressed his curiosity for their contribution.

3. Mr. Simon Mordue, Deputy Director-General Directorate-General Migration and Home Affairs, European Commission

Mr. Simon Mordue started his speech by underlining the unprecedented migratory pressure faced by MS these last years and the striking drop in irregular arrivals that the EU is witnessing now, which can be explained by several factors: the EU-Turkey agreement, training of coast guards, work with Niger, European Border and Coast Guard agency (EBCG), resettlement, etc. The European Commission (EC), Mr. Mordue said, argues for a comprehensive migration policy, including both internal and external dimensions of mi-

gration. To only address its external dimensions because they are easier to agree upon leaves us exposed to new "migration crises". Mr. Mordue listed the progresses made in several fields: protection of the EU's external borders, smoother nexus between asylum and return, faster procedures, etc. He mentioned the current negotiations on the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) regulation and the strengthening of the agency, which could provide greater support to MS on the frontline, as well as the reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) in general. The EU needs a robust asylum system, fit for easy and difficult times, which strikes a good balance between solidarity and responsibility. In its latest communication on migration, the EC stresses the need to now "agree and deliver" on at least 5 out of the 7 texts discussed. It is committed to support both co-legislators in finding common ground. According to Mr. Mordue, the Dublin regulation is no longer fit for purpose. "Asylum shopping" will remain as long as there are no harmonised recognition rates and reception conditions. At the same time, the Reception Conditions Directive (RCD) was not turned into a regulation to keep the needed flexibility by MS, but, Mr. Mordue insisted, MS should take into account the guidelines and standards, be prepared to provide adequate reception conditions also when under pressure and increase applicants' self-reliance, by foreseeing an earlier access to job market, for instance. In order to achieve this, MS can benefit from the EC's logistical and financial support. This support has shown concrete impact in Greece, such as more than 60 000 new accommodation and 160 000 minors supported. Mr. Mordue concluded his speech by underlining the need for asylum and reception authorities to have a format to exchange on their work. He thanked Fedasil and promised the work will not be lost.

4. Mr. Gonzalo Vargas Llosa, UNHCR Regional Representative for EU Affairs

Mr. Gonzalo Vargas Llosa first insisted on the added value of reception exchange programmes, such as those organised jointly by EPRA and EASO. He believes that positive and constructive criticism and peer review can help improve the reception systems and fill in their existing gaps. Mr. Vargas Llosa revisited the comments made by the UNCHR on the proposal for a recast of the RCD regarding detention, unaccompanied children, special reception needs and contingency planning. Mr. Vargas Llosa showed support for the collaboration of reception authorities with civil society. The UNHCR itself, he said, stands ready for collaboration with the EUAA, in the same way as with EASO. Then, Mr. Vargas Llosa mentioned the appalling reception conditions in the Greek islands and advocated, inter alia, that the transit of persons with specific needs to the mainland as well as the acceptance rate of family reunification requests be increased. Finally, Mr. Vargas Llosa discussed the importance of quality assessment in order to ensure transparency and accountability. It does not only benefit asylum seekers but also front-line staff as it can help prevent abuses and it would benefit from civil society's involvement.

5. Mr. Denis Haveaux, Director, Red Cross EU Office

Mr. Denis Haveaux first explained how the Red Cross/Red Crescent National Societies (RC) both work as reception providers, in cooperation with national governments and according to their standards, and adopt a cross sectorial approach and mainstream migration in most of their other activities. He insisted on the importance of legal assistance and identification of special needs, in particular for minors. Mr. Haveaux then discussed the challenge to achieve flexibility whilst avoiding

its harmful consequences on finances, human resources and quality. He presented two type of activities related to migration the RC movement has been developing over the years and more recently: raising awareness about migration to fight racism and discrimination, and facilitating migrants' access to work. Mr. Haveaux concluded by listing some of his concerns: distinction between development and humanitarian aid, strong support to civil society, minimum of 30% of the EU aid/development to be allocated to projects involving migrants and calling the MS to always fully implement EU law.

6. Questions & Answers

Mr. Mordue completed his intervention by underlining that legal pathways must be developed – it allows us to cut down smuggling and trafficking and grant protection to particularly vulnerable applicants – but it will never completely avert migration. However, the EU can work on a migration that is better prepared, better planned.

The Q&A session related to contingency planning: how to keep ready when decreasing reception capacity?

According to Mr. Mordue, the EU MS should use their capacity to support other MS facing more pressure with staff and equipment. Mr. Vargas Llosa wished to recall the global perspective: the vast majority of people seeking protection are not in Europe and do not intend to come. Now that Europe is under less pressure, it should be contributing more to address this global challenge. The Global Compact for Migration should be supported as it brings some positive changes: in terms of producing a greater support to countries hosting refugees, ensuring that refugees can reach self-sufficiency, increasing legal pathways, etc. Mr. Haveaux referred to existing practices and studies in the field of Disaster Risk Reduction that have developed by Red Cross/Red Crescent National Societies.

C. High level panel discussion

This session was moderated by Dr Hanne Beirens, Associate Director at Migration Policy Institute Europe. Dr. Beirens reminded the numerous developments which have occurred in the field of reception since the outset of EPRA. On the one hand, the flows have changed in terms of volume, profiles and routes; the situation has been more volatile on the ground. The reception authorities had to quickly adapt their reception system to cope with the continuous changes. On the other hand, the approaches developed by the governments and at EU level have changed too. The reception authorities had to rethink their reception model/network to cater for the needs and experiences of new types of migrants – from the relocation and resettlement programmes, for example. The new approaches such as the hotspots and processing centres, have brought all actors under one roof and tested and stimulated EU cooperation.

1. Mrs. Mirjam Schuit, Unit Manager, COA, The Netherlands

Mrs. Mirjam Schuit described the situation of reception in the Netherlands. The reception of applicants for international protection is centralised and the state own the real estate as well as its own staff. Mrs. Schuit recalled the situation of the last years when the Netherlands had to triple the capacity and the staff in two years' time. This effort could not have been achieved without the help of the Red Cross, Salvation Army and municipalities. Once the high influx was over, COA decreased its capacity. This exercise was a waste of financial and human resources. But the situation has changed, again, over the past months. The Netherlands have to cope with increased

arrivals of applicants who are less likely to receive protection and, in some cases, difficult to handle. Changing reception realities mean adaptation, whether in terms of staff (incl. training) or in terms of capacity. But opening up and closing down structures lead to dissatisfaction of both staff and partners. The Netherlands have therefore decided to work with scenarios based on prognoses and to include partners in the drafting on these scenarios to better prepare for future developments.

2. Mr. Pavel Bacik, Director, RFA, The Czech Republic

Mr. Pavel Bacik addressed the question of the communication with the media and the public opinion. He shared the Czech experience gained after the high influx of 2015. Prior to this date, there were no dedicated service within the Refugee Facilities Administration of the Ministry of the Interior (RFA). The need for such service appeared after false allegations in the media following incident allegedly involving applicants for international protection. The RFA decided to set up a press and public relation office to coordinate the communication with external stakeholders. Three staff members were recruited to monitor the press and social media, communicate with the media, organise events to disseminate accurate information about immigration and create a magazine. A communication strategy was developed to reach the largest number of people (e.g. students, media, public...), organise the communication between the different authorities involved and tackle disinformation. One of the key measures to fight “fake news” was to provide true stories about migrants that enable the media to foster positive views on migration.

3. Mrs. Virginie Lasserre, Head of Reception of asylum seekers and refugees Department, MinInt, France

Mrs. Virginie Lasserre presented the three main issues that the French government is currently dealing with. Firstly, she exposed the raise of applications in France due to secondary movements from other EU countries. This trend, except for a few other Member States, seems to go against the tide in the rest of the EU. Secondly, France is reorganising its reception system at the moment. To do so, France will set up specialised units to process Dublin applicants; new types of accommodations to redirect applicants to the most adapted reception structure; accelerated procedure to ease the outflow; facilities for vulnerable refugees; new referral mechanism for a fairer distribution of applicants on the French territory. Thirdly, France strives for the establishment of an ambitious national plan to improve integration, inter alia, by doubling the hours of French courses and strengthening the collaboration with sectors seeking employees.

4. Mrs. Fanny François, Director Policy Support, Fedasil, Belgium

Mrs. Fanny François started by exposing the current situation of reception in Belgium which is quite similar to the one in the Netherlands. The last months saw a steady decrease of the reception capacity, a restriction of the number of applications and the postponing of arrivals of resettled refugees. Regarding the lessons learnt from the previous high influx of applicants, progresses were made in managing spontaneous arrivals. Nevertheless, this experience showed the difficulty to guarantee efficiency (HR) and quality (special needs) while extending or reducing the

reception network at a steady pace. The challenge remains to balance the three key components of an effective reception network that responds to both a spontaneous and managed arrivals: partnership-professionalism-planning. In order to allow contingency planning and quick adaptation of the reception capacity, financial autonomy is needed. Regarding the partnership, the changes in the target groups require a better cooperation with stakeholders and partners. One last measure is the professionalization of practices regarding reception. EASO has taken the lead on that side by gathering data, analysing information and training European staff.

5. Mrs. Amapola Blasco Marhuenda, Deputy Director for International Protection Programmes, MEYSS, Spain

Mrs. Amapola Blasco Marhuenda started her speech by highlighting the raise of arrivals in Spain over the last months. From a very small reception network, Spain has to quickly adapt to welcome a growing number of applicants by expanding its network. But expanding the network means also reinforcing and adapting the capacity. In Spain, profiles of arrivals have changed too. The Syrian applicants of 2016 have been replaced by Latin American applicants (namely from Venezuela, Honduras and Columbia) mainly composed of families with children and with special needs. While Spain is rethinking its reception system (cf. Supreme Court's decision) by decentralising the management of reception structure to the regional governments, it has to bear in mind the necessary flexibility needed to cope with changing flows of applicants as well as with the phenomenon of secondary movement to other EU MS.

6. Questions & Answers

The Q&A session approached the question of predictability and the difficulty to forecast capacity needs. The Netherlands draft several times a year different possible scenarios and submit them to the stakeholders for consultation. The prognoses are presented to the agency and integrated in the business plan. This exercise aims to prepare the partners to the possible evolution of the reception network, convince them to take preparatory measures and create the opportunity for very practical and useful discussions. Belgium and Spain recalled the difficulty to forecast the capacity because it relies on two parameters, future inflows, on the one hand, and outflows, on the other hand. Those two indicators have to be taken into account when adapting the capacity of reception networks. In addition, when two ministries are in charge of asylum (procedure/accommodation), both ministries have to communicate efficiently with each other to be able to make prognoses.

D. Thematic session on reception

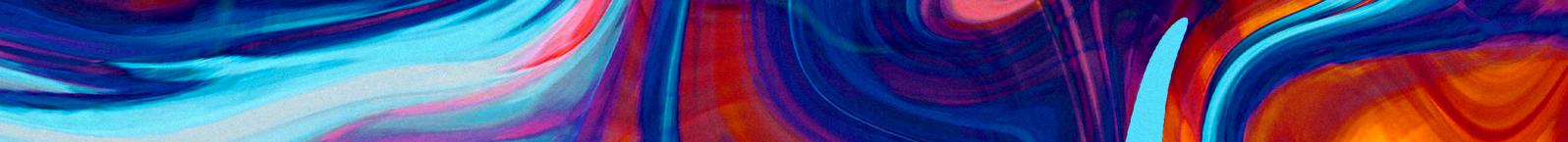
In order to introduce this thematic session, Mrs. Vinciane Masurelle presented the background of EPRA and its development phases: creation, consolidation and integration. Mrs. Masurelle then described EPRA's initial structure. It was first composed of 3 different elements: strategic discussions, thematic exchange and EPRA coordination team + national reference points. The high degree of expertise and flexibility allowed EPRA to react rapidly to emerging and practical issues in participating states. In 2016, a memorandum of understanding was concluded with EASO to ensure sustainability. Thanks to EASO, EPRA grew from 14 to 28 partner organisations and diversified

its activities. Finally, Mrs. Masurelle explained the conceptual framework, methodology, approach and philosophy on which EPRA activities were built. The "EPRA triangle" is a three dimensional approach to reception, which studies the balance and the relationship between quality, efficiency and flexibility.

Mrs. Masurelle opened the thematic session in which 3 reception authorities addressed how they concretely and technically deal with the 3 dimensions mentioned above, in an evolving perspective namely looking at how developments over the years have impacted policies, priorities and practices in reception.

1. Chain management, by Mr. Björn Bergström, Specialist, Swedish Migration Agency, Sweden

After having briefly presented the SMA, Mr. Bergström explained the proposal to change the reception system that is currently being discussed in Sweden. Currently the housing provided to adult applicants by SMA consists mostly of private apartments across the country (except in case of higher influx) but applicants can also choose their accommodation themselves or live with friends/relatives. The challenges faced by the current system include: applicants tend to live in the same places with the same community, long processing times (applicants have to travel far to reach their asylum interviews), in times of high influx municipalities are expected to quickly take applicant in and provide them with various services, correlation between availability of jobs and affordable housing and the huge variation in quality within private market. In the proposed new reception system, large processing centres, located near international airports and integrating all services under one roof, accommodate all applicants after their arrival during 30 days, the



processing time of asylum applications is reduced and, in a second phase, applicants who are likely to be granted protection are transferred to regular accommodations whilst the others are transferred to “return centres”. The SMA welcomes some parts of the proposed plan but is concerned with others because of: the lack of interpreters to attend asylum interviews; the risk that too small number of applicants in one municipality are not sufficient to create capacity there; the difficulty to find large buildings in Gothenburg/Stockholm; the increased risk of incidents in large reception facilities. It put forward an alternative, the pilot project “Asyl 360”: in which 50% of applicants receive a decision within 30 days and are accommodated nearby the asylum bodies.

The “one stop” approach was then discussed. On the one hand, it requires the involved services to collectively identify the risks and put in place measures to cope with these risks and it increases the risk for the reception agency, as it becomes more dependent on the other actors’ proper functioning. On the other hand, all actors speak to the same applicants and this can foster cooperation and problem solving, whilst with municipalities it remains difficult.

2. Reception flexibility, by Mr. Masoud Safavifard, Senior Adviser, Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, Norway

Mr. Masoud Safavifard first presented the evolution in Norway – lowest average reception capacity and lowest arrivals figures in 2018. Mr. Safavifard then explained the UDI’s contingency plans, which consist of both a clearly defined framework for collaboration internally and with key state agencies, and internal operational contingency plans that regulate internal resource allocation and correct use of the instruments/measures available during a crisis. Since 2015, work has been done to improve flexibility on both legislative and structural levels. Changes are to be made in the law to make finding new building easier by exempting UDI from some technical requirements and allowing UDI to request properties/buildings for converting and use as a reception centre whenever necessary. Also, UDI has developed a new tender procedure, additional capacity (arrival centre) as well as framework agreements for operational emergency solutions. Thanks to the latter, UDI can pre-arrange all measures to be taken in case of high influx, be they barrack towns, conversion of industrial and office buildings, accommodation in hotels, apartments and campsites, etc. For instance, the new tender procedure means that providers who win the initial competition are pre-qualified and, in case of emergency, UDI can go to them and, after only a short competition, can easily pick the lowest offer and start working. Mr. Safavifard concluded his presentation by listing some of the challenges UDI has met over the years.

The members of the panel were consulted on the topic of reception flexibility. Mr. Bergström highlighted the challenges of public procurements, preparedness without the costs, flexibility when it comes to staff (including their relocation), etc. Does the new proposal increase the preparedness of the SE reception system? It may to some extent, as concentrating accommodation would give one key actor most responsibilities in the area of reception instead of sharing them between numerous actors. In Austria, there is no contingency plan but contingency measures. The focus in 2015-2016 was to increase capacity and staff and make structural adjustment in the department. Now the focus has shifted to scaling down the capacity and increasing return rate (return centres, return counselling).

3. Reception quality monitoring, by Mrs. Maria Pollhammer and Mrs. Anamaria Sipos, Reception experts, Basic and Federal Care, Federal Ministry of the Interior, Austria

Mrs. Maria Pollhammer briefly introduced the organisation of the Austrian reception system, its latest statistics and its legal background. Mrs. Pollhammer then described the quality framework in place and how the quality standards are monitored. First, internal monitoring only refers to federal reception facilities. It is done through personnel of the reception authority present in all federal reception facilities 24 hours a day; monitoring of compliance with obligations arising from the care contract at least once a week with subsequent follow up measures and deadline imposed on the contractor; audits organised on an ad-hoc basis and monthly performance reports by private contractor. The template used to assess this performance – presented during the confer-

ence by Mrs. Anamaria Sipos – is a checklist for the private contractor that allows self-assessment and data gathering. The questions are mostly related to staff, building repairs, cooperation with other stakeholders, etc. Secondly, external audits are conducted by the Austrian Ombudsman Board (AOB) and international organisations, such as the UNHCR and OSCE. The AOB ensures objectivity and impartiality as set in the law. It offers recommendations. The reception facilities receive the opportunity to react to the findings. International organisations monitor the implementation of international law in domestic law. They conduct audits with applicants for international protection and the staff. For example, they recently scrutinised the method used to recognise a victim of trafficking and the support and care offered to the victims. Thirdly and lastly, the complaint mechanism provides applicants with the possibility to lodge complaints in a non-bureaucratic way, in front of supervisors or in a “complaints box”. In the future, the Austrian reception system will be managed by a unique reception agency – that is not profit oriented and non-dependent on external actors.

Mrs. Sofie De Bisschop, Head of the Quality unit, Fedasil, was given the floor to mention two ongoing projects in the field of quality assessment in BE. First, all operators have agreed on common reception standards, applicable nationwide and in all types of facilities and addressing all aspects of reception, including special needs. The development of these standards was fed by and fed into the development of the EASO Guidance on unaccompanied children. Secondly, based on these standards, Fedasil now conducts audits, performed by Fedasil staff. In the future Fedasil wishes to involve applicants and develop a practical tool for auditors.

E. Concluding session

1. Mr. Jean-Pierre Luxen, Fedasil Managing Director

Mr. Jean-Pierre Luxen first thanked the participants and the speakers. Mr. Luxen underlined the important role of the high level speakers in reminding us that asylum and reception matters should be addressed collectively. He referred to the speakers in the high level panel's contribution on how reception authorities strategically evolve and adapt in a highly volatile environment and how the need for coordination and cooperation never diminishes. He thanked the thematic experts and expressed the wish that the fruitful and friendly relationships which have been built through EPRA activities last and continue to draw us closer. Mr. Luxen then officially closed the EPRA platform and handed its results over to EASO. He expressed his confidence in the process that has seen the platform evolve towards a sustainable and lively network, wished Mr. Addou the best in developing further the EU+ States capacities in the field of reception and reaffirmed that Fedasil stands ready to keep investing in the network. Finally, Mr. Luxen thanked Michael Kegels and Vinciane Masurelle for having fully engaged in the project and been, together with their team, the driving forces of a very positive change.

2. Mr. Jamil Addou, EASO Executive Director a.i.

To begin with, Mr. Jamil Addou underlined reception's key role in the asylum system. He paid tribute to Fedasil's good will in working together with EASO and ensuring the sustainability of the EPRA project's output. Mr. Addou praised the strengthening of the EASO reception network and the example it sets in terms of MS meeting together but also delivering tangible results. EPRA brought to the table a group of MS who were fully committed to working together and this greatly facilitated EASO's work in creating the network. Mr. Addou promised that EASO will continue investing in reception through more exchange programmes, operational support, etc. He presented Greece, Italy and Cyprus as good examples that expertise can be brought to the ground, largely thanks to MS. Finally, Mr. Addou reiterated EASO's commitment to take EPRA's work to the next level.



F. Annexes

Annex 1 List of participants

Annex 2 Master PowerPoint of the EPRA Final conference
