2020 discharge: European Asylum Support Office (EASO)

2021/2122(DEC) - 04/05/2022 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided to **grant discharge** to the Executive Director of the European Asylum Support Office in respect of the implementation of the Office's budget for the financial year 2020 and to approve the closure of the accounts for that year.

Parliament noted with appreciation that after four years in a row, the reasons for qualifying the opinion on expenditure underlying the accounts have been solved by the Office.

Noting that the Court of Auditors stated that it had obtained reasonable assurance that the Institute's annual accounts for the financial year 2020 were reliable and that the underlying transactions were legal and regular, Parliament adopted, by 503 votes to 85 with 53 abstentions, a resolution containing a series of recommendations which form an integral part of the discharge decision and which complement the general recommendations contained in the resolution on the performance, financial management and control of EU agencies.

Office’s financial statements

The final budget of the Office for the financial year 2020 was EUR 130 986 611, representing an increase of 27.25 % compared to 2019. The increase mostly concerns an increase in expenditure related to operational support.

Budgetary and financial management

The budget monitoring efforts during the financial year 2020 resulted in a budget implementation rate of 95.14 %, at approximately the same level as 2019 (95.22 %). Parliament noted with concern that the payment appropriations execution rate was at 80.91 %, which the Court deems as low, representing a decrease of 8.95 % compared to the previous year (89.86 %). It also noted with concern the Court’s conclusion that the carry-overs of committed appropriations for operating expenditure were high, at 33.8 %, and that the cancellation rate of budget appropriations carried over from 2019 to 2020 was also high, at 19 %. The Office should improve its budget planning and implementation cycles.

Moreover, effective policies have been established for managing rented premises and related services which has been welcomed by Parliament.

Other comments

Parliament also made a series of observations concerning performance, staff policy, public procurement and Covid-19.

In particular, it noted that:

- the Office reported that it executed a total of 5 313 payments in 2020, compared to 9 871 payments in 2019, with 334 (6.29 %) of the payments executed more than 30 days after receipt of the invoice, compared to 1 312 (13.29 %) in 2019;

- about 13 600 applications for asylum were lodged by unaccompanied minors in the Member States. Parliament stressed the importance of providing a specific reception system for minors that protects them;

- the Office achieved or surpassed targets for a majority of key performance indicators, despite the difficulties faced because of the Covid-19 pandemic;

- unfortunately, the Office continued to face difficulties in fulfilling certain tasks as a result of its outdated mandate, especially in terms of the legal framework and mechanisms for deployment of asylum support teams providing the support required by the Member States;

- it signed a new operational support plan with Spain in 2020, bringing the total number of countries assisted by the Office to eight;

- on 31 December 2020, the establishment plan was 78.96 % executed, with 289 temporary agents appointed out of 366 temporary agents authorised under the Union budget (compared to 284 authorised posts in 2019) and a further 17 posts offered or accepted. While progress has been made in attracting new staff, the low execution rate meant that for a fourth consecutive year in a row the Office did not succeed in achieving its establishment plan targets;

- gender balance is worrying at senior management level with 83.3 % men and 16.7 % women;

- the Office launched 65 procedures in 2020, compared to 48 in 2019, of which a majority negotiated procedures with one candidate (40 %) and open calls (26.15 %);

- lastly, a Covid-19 response team was established and support was given to Member States to address the challenges arising from the pandemic.