EDITORIAL

2013 has been a year full of developments in the area of asylum in the EU. The adoption of the ‘asylum package’ in June marks a leap in quality in EU asylum standards. Now that the legislation is in place, the big challenge ahead concerns the implementation of the agreed instruments. 2014 will be a crucial year for the implementation and EASO will be there to assist and support Member States with this project.

Looking back at 2013, we cannot not mention the tragic events which happened in the Mediterranean and all those who lost their lives seeking a better future. In the context, the Task Force Mediterranean (TFM) was set up. EASO formed part of the TFM. The report of the TFM was presented at the JHA Council on 5 December. EASO will have an important role to play in the implementation of a large number of measures proposed by the TFM.

On behalf of the EASO Team, I would like to wish all our readers a Christmas full of harmony and a New Year full of cooperation, inspiration and happiness.

Jean-Pierre Schembri
Newsletter Editor
EASO Spokesperson

EASO Management Board Meeting

On 29 November 2013 the 13th meeting of the EASO Management Board was held in Malta. The EASO Management Board is made up of representatives of EU Member States, the Commission and UNHCR. Frontex was also represented at the meeting. Representatives of Associate Countries attended as observers. The Management Board discussed the situation of asylum in the EU (with particular focus on Syria and on the Mediterranean), the Operating Plans for Greece and Bulgaria, and the external dimension strategy. The Management Board also held an exchange of views on the Early warning and Preparedness System (EPS). Professional development activities, with particular focus on the EASO training programme, were also discussed. During the meeting, the Management Board adopted, amongst other things, the Multi Annual Work Programme 2014-2016, the Multi Annual Staff Policy Plan 2014-2016, EASO’s Budget for 2014, and the outline of the Work Programme, budget and establishment plan for 2015.

EASO and UNHCR sign working arrangement

On 13 December 2013, Dr. Robert K. Visser, EASO Executive Director, and Mr António Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), have signed a working arrangement which defines areas and objectives of cooperation between EASO and UNHCR. In line with their mandates, the working arrangement aims at establishing a more structured cooperation framework on relevant areas of common work, creating synergies and fostering coherence between the different actions pursued by EASO and UNHCR. Main areas of cooperation include: training and professional development; exchange of best practices and expertise on quality initiatives and projects; Country of Origin Information (COI); data and information gathering and analysis; identifying vulnerable persons; and resettlement and relocation activities. Read more on page 6.
On 4 November, Ambassador William Lacy Swing, Director General of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) visited EASO’s Headquarters in Malta and held a meeting with the Executive Director of EASO, Dr Robert K. Visser. During the meeting the two discussed EASO’s contribution to the Common European Asylum System and how EASO and IOM could further strengthen their cooperation in the near future.

IOM is a member of EASO’s Consultative Forum. IOM has recently cooperated with EASO in its support to Greece and has participated in EASO expert meetings on relocation and resettlement. IOM has also contributed to the management of the EUREMA pilot project. Ambassador Swing visited EASO while on an official visit to the Government of Malta. During the meeting with Ambassador Swing, EASO’s Executive Director, Dr Visser, introduced EASO’s tools and operational activities and explained that EASO adopts a bottom up, evidence based approach. During the meeting, the two highlighted the importance of tackling the root causes of the irregular immigration phenomena, in particular the importance of breaking the human trafficking and smuggling networks.

The strengthening of future cooperation between IOM and EASO was also discussed, in particular the possibility of cooperation with IOM on future relocation and resettlement activities, voluntary returns, unaccompanied minors, and also cooperation on EASO’s actions related to the external dimension of the CEAS. EASO and IOM can also cooperate in cases of asylum emergencies.

EASO to take over the Chair of the JHA agencies network in 2014

The Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Agencies established a network in 2006 to foster bilateral and multilateral cooperation and synergies in areas of common interest, such as strategic and operational work, external relations or training.

EASO will give particular attention to the work of the JHA Agencies in the new multiannual framework for the JHA area to be adopted in 2014 (the so called “post-Stockholm programme”). EASO will also emphasise the operational inter-agency cooperation, strengthening the principle of complementarity and the added value at EU level.

FACT BOX: The EU JHA Agencies are: the European Union’s Judicial Cooperation Unit (Eurojust); the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (Frontex); the European Agency for the Operational Management of Large-Scale IT Systems in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (eu-LISA); the European Asylum Support Office (EASO); the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA); the European Police College (CEPOL); the European Police Office (Europol); and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA).
In recent years, applications for asylum made by citizens of the Western Balkans (WB) countries (when considered together) have consistently represented the highest numbers of asylum requests made in the EU (exceeding the numbers from any other country of origin). This is despite the fact that applications from Western Balkans citizens are largely considered to be unfounded by Member States and Associated Countries (MSAC) - as shown by a rejection rate of 96% in 2012. The EASO report on asylum flows from the Western Balkans aims to provide the first accurate and comprehensive overview of the flow of asylum seekers from the Western Balkans and Member States’ reaction to it. EASO’s latest publication:

1. Accurately describes the main characteristics of the recent flow of WB citizens applying for international protection in Member States and Associated Countries - who, from where, to where, over which period of time
2. Examines the principal factors determining decisions by Western Balkans citizens to leave their country and apply for asylum in the EU (push factors)
3. Examines the factors which affect their choice of destination country (pull factors)
4. Looks at measures put in place by the MSAC most concerned and by WB authorities to address these push and pull factors, and efficiently process applications from WB citizens

The report highlights that the WB flow is limited to a small number of MSAC and in some cases greatly affects their asylum systems’ ability to process other claims. The number of applications is variable over time (while showing a general upward trend) and strongly seasonal (increasingly so in recent years), with the major peaks being seen just before winter.

Asylum seekers from Western Balkans consist mainly of Roma from Serbia and FYROM, and Albanians from Albania and Kosovo. Though Western Balkans citizens face one of the highest rejection rates of asylum claims of any countries of origin, the rate varies by destination country and by country of origin, with Albania seeing the highest number of positive decisions and FYROM the lowest overall.

The most important push factors behind the decision of some WB citizens to claim asylum in MSAC are considered to be the societal problems of specific groups, which are closely linked – especially in the case of Roma – to unemployment and poverty. In turn, problems accessing the labour market has led many to rely on social infrastructure and services (including welfare benefits) that are insufficient – thus constituting a third push factor. Finally, it should be noted that also insufficient and poorly accessible health care constitutes a push factor for a small but significant number of applicants.

The principal pull factors determining the choice of destination country are mainly economic in nature. MSAC experts see the linked issues of (particularly cash) benefits provided during the asylum procedure and the related issue of long processing times as the main factors determining both the decision of WB citizens to apply for asylum and where they apply for asylum. The presence of an existing diaspora is likely to be a strong factor given the almost perfect correlation between the stock of residence permits and the list of MSAC most affected by the WB flow. The possibilities to find legal or illegal work may also be important depending on the profile of the applicants. Tangible benefits other than cash, such as health care may be particularly important as pull factors for certain individual profiles of applicant. A catalogue of measures has been taken by MSAC to reduce both push and pull factors. The report stresses that a package of measures, which must include at minimum very short procedures for manifestly unfounded applications (while allowing the possibility of normal procedures where cases have any merit) and reduced cash benefits appears to be the most effective contribution to reducing numbers of largely unfounded applications.

The report makes use of EUROSTAT statistics and is based on an analyses of replies to detailed questionnaires provided by experts involved in various aspects of dealing with the phenomenon both in the region and in the destination countries. It is also based on the results of a Practical Cooperation meeting hosted by EASO in March 2013.

Desk research and a study visit to selected Western Balkan countries have further complemented the analysis and allowed EASO to illustrate the broader context in which pull and push factors should be interpreted. The report can be accessed via the following link:

On 27 and 28 November 2013, EASO held the third EASO Consultative Forum plenary meeting in Malta. This year’s Consultative Forum Plenary meeting was attended by more than 80 participants from around 45 different organisations. Topics discussed were: EASO’s Early warning and Preparedness System (EPS), EASO’s work in Greece, EASO’s quality processes, EASO’s case study about the Western Balkans, EASO’s role on the external dimension of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), Common Country of Origin Information (COI) products produced by EASO, and EASO’s role in emergency situations. The annual plenary meeting of the Consultative Forum is an event that brings registered members of the EASO Consultative Forum together to look at the experience of the past year of working together, identify lessons learned and earmark areas of future cooperation.

As a European centre of expertise, consultation for EASO is not just an annual meeting but a continuous two-way dialogue that brings together experts on the many aspects of asylum to share knowledge and expertise. This process provides additional insight and information which helps EASO develop more comprehensive and advanced practical cooperation tools aimed at supporting the implementation the Common European Asylum System. Ultimately, the aim is to ensure that Member States are better able to provide international protection to those who are entitled, while dealing fairly and efficiently with those who do not qualify for it.

The Consultative Forum discussed a wide range of topics including EASO’s Early warning and Preparedness System (EPS), EASO’s work in Greece, EASO’s quality processes, EASO’s case study about the Western Balkans, EASO’s role on the external dimension of the Common European Asylum System, Common Country of Origin Information products produced by EASO, and EASO’s role in emergency situations. The meeting ended with a comprehensive and insightful panel discussion on the implementation of the CEAS and perspectives for the post-Stockholm programme. Speakers on the panel were Dr. Robert K. Visser, EASO Executive Director, Mr. Laurent Muschel, Director Asylum and Migration, European Commission, Mr. Vincent Cochetel, Director, UNHCR, Europe Bureau, Mr. Michael Diedring, Secretary General, ECRE and Dr. Violeta Moreno-Lax, Lecturer in Law, University of London. In order to familiarise themselves with EASO’s work and its staff, Consultative Forum members also visited the EASO’s Headquarters and attended a series of presentations by EASO staff members covering different areas of EASO work.

EASO’s Executive Director stated that ‘In 2013 alone, over 30 organisations have been involved either directly or indirectly in our work. I believe that there is room for more cooperation between EASO and civil society, but as in any good relationship, the process develops and matures over time. The presence of so many relevant organisations here today confirms the willingness to engage and that makes me believe that within the right parameters, we can create EU-wide synergies.’
JHA Council discusses the report of the Task Force Mediterranean

On 5 December the JHA Council had a discussion on the communication of the Commission on the work of the Task Force Mediterranean and welcomed the set of actions contained in the document. The task force identified five main areas of action which will be pursued actively during the coming months:

– Actions in cooperation with third countries.
– Regional protection, resettlement and reinforced legal avenues to Europe.
– Fight against trafficking, smuggling and organised crime.
– Reinforced border surveillance contributing to enhancing maritime situational picture and to the protection of saving of lives of migrants in the Mediterranean.
– Assistance and solidarity with member states dealing with high migration pressure.

The Presidency will report to the European Council in December on the matter. The Task Force Mediterranean was set up following the JHA Council of 7-8 October 2013 in order to identify the tools which the EU has at its disposal and which could be used in a more effective way to avoid the tragic events that had occurred off the coast of Lampedusa.

At its meeting on 24-25 October, the European Council agreed to take the appropriate measures in order to prevent and to avoid that such tragedies happen again, guided by the imperative of prevention and protection and guided by the principle of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility. The European Council invited the Task Force Mediterranean, lead by the Commission and involving member states, the EEAS and a number of EU Agencies, including EASO, to identify priority actions for a more efficient short term use of European policies and tools. It asked the Commission to report on the work of the TFM to the Council on 5 December 2013 with a view to taking operational decisions. It also asked the Presidency to report to the European Council in December 2013.

EASO’s Executive Director, attended the Council meeting.

EASO’s support to the Italian Judiciary

Within the framework of EASO’s Special Support Plan to Italy, EASO is organising three pilot seminars for the Italian judiciary in close cooperation with the Italian school for the judiciary.

The seminars have been tailored to the needs expressed by Italian judges in the areas of evidence assessment, credibility, interviewing techniques and Country of Origin Information (COI). The seminars are being held in Malta between October and December 2013 with the support of the International Association of Refugee Law Judges, the Association of European Administrative Judges and UNHCR.

A total of forty judges from different Courts in Italy are participating in the pilot seminars; so far, they have appreciated the methodology as well as the practical nature of the discussions, which were found very relevant to their work. Additional results include a continued exchange of practice among Italian participants as well as the exploration of concrete strategies to overcome the challenges faced by judges due to the civil nature of international protection procedures in Italy.

In view of the positive evaluation made of the first seminar on evidence assessment and credibility, the Italian school for the judiciary is planning to incorporate a series of EASO events in its official program for 2014.

For a full update on EASO activities in Italy, please see article on page 9.
On 13 December 2013, Dr. Robert K. Visser, EASO Executive Director, and Mr. António Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), have signed a working arrangement which defines areas and objectives of cooperation between EASO and UNHCR.

The European Union (EU) is developing a Common European Asylum System (CEAS) in line with the Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, as well as the right to asylum and the principle of non-refoulement as laid down in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

As an EU agency, EASO plays a key role in the coherent implementation of the CEAS by supporting Member States and the EU Institutions to fulfil their European and international obligations in this field.

EASO provides technical and operational support and strengthens practical cooperation among Member States in the field of asylum. UNHCR is mandated under international treaties to lead and coordinate action to ensure protection of refugees, asylum-seekers and other persons of concern worldwide, and to assist governments in implementing durable solutions.

In line with their mandates, the working arrangement aims at establishing a more structured cooperation framework on relevant areas of common work, creating synergies and fostering coherence between the different actions pursued by EASO and UNHCR.

Main areas of cooperation include: training and professional development; exchange of best practices and expertise on quality initiatives and projects; Country of Origin Information (COI); data and information gathering and analysis; identifying vulnerable persons; and resettlement and relocation activities.

Dr. Robert K. Visser, EASO Executive Director, commended the excellent ongoing cooperation with UNHCR from the inception of the Agency, and stated that ‘from the very beginning, UNHCR, as a non-voting Member of the EASO Management Board and as member of the EASO Consultative Forum, has been very active in EASO’s activities and has cooperated with EASO on a wide range of issues. I am confident that the working arrangement will further strengthen this cooperation’.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, underlining the non-political mandates of both agencies to help States to meet their obligations towards persons in need of international protection stressed that: ‘The cooperation between UNHCR and EASO should contribute to the strengthening of asylum and protection in Europe and worldwide. This is of crucial importance, not least as we face a humanitarian crisis unparalleled in recent history at Europe’s doorstep, with the displacement of millions of Syrian refugees.’

EASO convened a practical cooperation expert meeting on resettlement on 12 and 13 November 2013, in order to assist Member States in identifying their resettlement needs in the EU context and support them in making annual pledges in the light of available EU funding in this field. Participants discussed resettlement in practice and how to prepare the way for potential joint selection missions. Key elements in a successful selection mission from a national perspective were identified and EASO’s future role in the funding – pledging cycle was further defined.

It is also important to note that the first EASO seminar of EU resettlement policy was held on 22 and 23 October 2012. The meeting focused on the national resettlement schemes state of play, EU funding available for resettlement and on support as seen from the social perspective. This meeting brought together EU resettlement specialists and policy practitioners, for the first time, under the coordination of EASO.

Following EASO’s fact finding exercise on relocation activities from Malta and the expert meeting on relocation organized by EASO in June 2013, on 14 November 2013, EASO organized a practical cooperation meeting on relocation. 11 Member States, the European Commission (DG HOME), UNHCR and IOM participated in the meeting. Discussions focused on the practical and legislative aspects of a common relocation approach, the development of support material on how to translate the use of EU funding for relocation in practice and the mapping of relocation best practices in Member States, including internal organization systems and reception and integration conditions. Participants shared their knowledge and best practices on relocation within the EU.

EASO advocated a common relocation approach, on the basis of a common framework, funding, information provided by EASO and tools developed by EASO. Hence, a common approach rather than a permanent scheme could be envisaged. Bilateral relocation activities outside the common approach would still be possible.

Participants agreed on the specific EASO tools for relocation, such as the development of a practical handbook and methodology on relocation. EASO will conduct an update of the fact finding report on relocation in early 2014 and discuss with the Member States in focus groups settings. As a follow-up from the above-mentioned meetings, EASO is considering creating an EASO practical cooperation network on resettlement and relocation. While acknowledging the substantive differences between resettlement and relocation, a single network would enable optimising the participation of experts, since the expertise in the Member States appears to be under the same authority and individual entity.

In addition, in line with its Work Programme for 2014, EASO will organise two practical cooperation meetings on relocation next year, complemented by the Annual Relocation Forum organized by the European Commission.
National Common Portal Administrators Meeting

On 19 November, the National Common Portal Administrators (NCPAs) met for the third time this year in Malta, after a first meeting in February and hands-on training in April. The purpose of this meeting was to provide them with a state of play on COI Portal development and to reflect on their role and activities as NCPAs. Aside from the new visual identity of the platform, participants were informed about the new national COI database connections (by Norway, and soon Sweden and Finland) and the addition of new staff to work on the COI Portal (a COI Portal SNE and, as of 1 February 2014, a COI Portal Maintenance officer). The NCPA of the Slovak Republic delivered a presentation on their national “Migdoc” database and on her experience as NCPA. Participants were also given an overview of the connection process of the German database MILo, the first external system to connect to the Portal. The different stakeholders involved in the maintenance, development and support of the COI Portal and their current workflow were also described to participants.

Break-out sessions served as an opportunity to share experiences and discuss improvements in the usability of the Portal. Participants agreed that an upgrade of the search function, the notification system as well as the redesign of some features would greatly contribute to the usability of the Portal and to its promotion. NCPAs identified various possible tools to ensure a better management of their national upload areas and registrations. In the course of this one day meeting, hands-on training was also provided to the NCPAs who could not participate in the April training. Next step will be to finalize the user guide and provide NCPAs with a “starter kit” for internal training and promotion. The development of a video tutorial to guide new users was also welcomed.

EASO Training Curriculum Translations

In acknowledgment of the strong commitment expressed by various Member States towards using EASO’s Training Curriculum and following the adoption of the new asylum package as well as the entry into force of the Qualification Directive in December 2013, EASO has decided to support Member States by financing the translation of the core EASO Training module on Inclusion into a number of national languages of the Member States.

This ‘one-time’ decision to support Member States shall contribute towards the harmonisation of asylum practice in Europe. Together with the Inclusion Module, EASO will be also translating two newly launched Handbooks on Inclusion and on the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) Module.

By the end of this year, EASO will also introduce its EASO Training Brochure. The Training Brochure contains an overview of the current EASO Training Curriculum with a brief description of each individual training module.
EASO special support is aimed at supporting the enhancement of the asylum and reception systems of Member States, which will eventually result in a high-quality asylum process.

Italy faces large fluctuations in the number of arrivals of immigrants. In such a context, when a large influx occurs, the national asylum and reception system may come under significant pressure. Such situations present various challenges such as limited reception capacity, long duration for processing asylum applications and guaranteeing a homogenous level of services across the board.

Moreover, it is pertinent to note that Member States are currently facing the additional challenge of implementing the new instruments of the ‘asylum package’. Italy recognises the need of keeping a high standard for the asylum and reception process and to effectively implement the new European asylum package. This has motivated Italy to ask EASO for assistance.

On 4 June 2013, EASO and Italy signed a special support plan which provides for EASO Special Support to Italy, until the end of 2014, in a number of prioritized areas, such as data collection and analysis, Country of Origin Information (COI), Dublin system, reception system and emergency capacity, and training of independent judiciary.

EASO Special Support Plan to Italy includes 45 support activities of technical and operational assistance. Support teams have been established of experts from BE, CH, CZ, IE, NL, RO, SE, UK and EASO.

EASO support to Italy is currently work in progress. As regards Italy’s reception system, EASO activities focus on quality insurance and facilitating the implementation of the new asylum package, and aim at improving the monitoring activities of the reception facilities. EASO and Italy have already defined a set of quality standards and mechanisms for reception. A mapping exercise of reception centres according to a set of qualitative indicators was conducted in November 2013. On this basis, a plan will be drafted to increase the flexibility and harmonize the existing reception capacity in line with current needs and resources.

As regards Italy’s Dublin system, EASO activities focus on more effective inter-institutional relations between the central and territorial offices. A technical report was prepared by experts in the support team, describing the requirements in infrastructure, staff, resources, as well as a training plan on the DubliNet system, Dublin procedures and best handling of vulnerable cases was prepared for the Italian Dublin Unit in the Ministry of Interior.

Three thematic workshops on the management and practical implementation of the Dublin Regulation Procedures have been organised. All personnel involved in the field are currently being trained in Rome, through an advanced video-conference system. A manual on the management and practical implementation of the Dublin Regulation procedures will be made available next year.

As regards Italy’s Country of Origin Information (COI) capacity, three workshops for Italian asylum decision-makers, both at territorial and central level, have been organized during October-December 2013. EASO provided training on the following topics: research standards on Country of Origin Information, specific COI on Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria, Senegal, Mali and Ghana.
Kick off meeting for EASO activities in Bulgaria

EASO and Bulgaria signed, on 17 October 2013, an Operating Plan which provides for EASO support to Bulgaria until the end of September 2014.

The *kick-off meeting* for the implementation of the EASO Operating Plan to Bulgaria took place on 5 November 2013 in Sofia, marking the implementation of the support offered by EASO to Bulgaria.

Various activities have already been set up, for example: support given to the reception system; support on COI matters; and support on training of new staff. In this regard, EASO has started the translation process of three EASO training modules into Bulgarian, making these modules available for Bulgarian officials in early 2014.

In addition, the identification of experts for an immediate support on the absorption of emergency financial support to Bulgaria under EU Funds (SOLID Programme) is on-going.

Besides this, experts deployed in Bulgaria are already providing support on the pre-registration of asylum seekers.

Other experts are focussing on mapping out the asylum process and suggesting step-by-step solutions for the Bulgarian asylum registration, asylum procedure and reception process.

EASO will also provide training for Bulgarian officials, capacity building on Country of Origin Information (COI), organise thematic workshops and provide technical advice and quality standards.

This includes planning a strategy to increase the capacity of reception facilities and to make better use of existing reception capacities.

2nd EASO-FRONTEX training session on identity and nationality establishment in Greece

As part of the EASO Operating Plan to Greece Phase II, a second joint EASO-FRONTEX pilot training session on identity and nationality establishment was organised in Fylakio (north of Greece) during 18-20 November 2013, for the staff of the First Reception Service, Asylum Service and Hellenic Police.

Two experts from Slovenia and Germany were engaged in the training, together with EASO and FRONTEX training and operational expertise.

21 persons were trained in Fylakio in this training course, on the basis of the training content of FRONTEX (screening interview) and training content of EASO (Evidence Assessment and Interviewing Vulnerable Persons).

Trainees were trained in identity and nationality establishment in the context of mixed flows and asylum procedure, evidence assessment in the asylum context, practical arrangements for the interview, detection and interviewing of vulnerable persons, as well as other country specific information.

Such activities will continue in 2014.
EASO Training

Overview of EASO training activities

EASO is now reaching the end of the training year 2013. The first training session of the newly developed Common European Asylum System (CEAS) Module started in November and will be followed by the face-to-face session on 18-20 December in Malta. Together with the CEAS Module, EASO also initiated the online part of the End of Protection Module, which will be followed by the face-to-face session on 17-20 December.

In 2014 EASO will start its training programme with the newly updated training on Inclusion Module. During the training National Contact Points (NCP) meeting Member States agreed that the Inclusion Module shall be considered as a core module for all the target groups. This has motivated EASO to start the training year 2014 with the Inclusion Module.

The online part of the train-the-trainer session will start on 10 February and will be followed by the face-to-face session on 11-14 March. The registration deadline for the train-the trainer session on the Inclusion Module is 27 January.

Please see page 14 for a complete plan of EASO Training Curriculum courses which will be organized in 2014.

EASO Annual Reference Group Meeting

On 22 and 23 October EASO organised the Annual Reference Group meeting. The aim of this annual meeting was to present an overview of the recent training developments and discuss the training and update plans for 2014. EASO also presented to the Reference Group, represented by UNHCR, ECRE and the International Association of Refugee Law Judges (IARLJ), the new learning path which was positively received. During this meeting, the members of the Reference Group had the opportunity to meet a delegation from the European Parliament’s Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee (LIBE) who were visiting EASO with the aim of familiarising themselves with the work of the Agency.

This meeting with the Reference Group also served as a platform to discuss EASO’s new training Handbook. In this regard, two pilot handbooks: the CEAS and Inclusion Handbooks were presented to the Members of the Reference Group. The Reference Group’s concrete input on these developments allowed EASO to do the final review of these two documents and further enhance the content of these new training tools. Both handbooks have now been finalized and submitted for translations. These handbooks will be offered as part of EASO’s training package when trainees complete the Inclusion and CEAS modules.
1. **Number of Applicants for International Protection in the EU+**

The total number of asylum applicants in October 2013 was 8% higher compared to September 2013 and 7% higher than the same month in 2012. If these provisional numbers are confirmed when reported to Eurostat, this would be the biggest number of asylum applicants reported in any month since EU-level data collection began in 2008.

2. **Top Countries of Origin (% of total claims) in EU+ countries**

Nationals coming from Western Balkans countries continued to represent the largest proportion of asylum applicants in the first eight months of 2013 when considered together but applicants from Russia were 10% of the total for single source countries.

3. **Latest Country of Origin Trends**

**Syria**
- There was a sharp increase in asylum claims by Syrians overall in the EU+, in particular in Sweden and Bulgaria, compared to August and September 2013.

- Syria was in the top 3 countries of origin of 17 Member States and Associated Countries in October.

**Russia**
- Russian applications experienced a strong downward trend in October compared to September, particularly in Poland and Germany.

**Western Balkans**
- Western Balkans (WB) applicants were approximately at the same level as recorded in September 2013; overall the numbers for WB applicants remain higher than in previous years.
- Germany continued to receive the vast majority of the WB influx.
On 11 and 12 November, EASO organized its fourth thematic meeting in the quality matrix process. The meeting, under the topic of ‘Quality and Exclusion’, focused on exclusion from international protection. Representatives of participating states, EASO, UNHCR and IGC came together to discuss the different grounds for exclusion, organizational aspects linked to the consideration of exclusion clauses, as well as possible consequences of exclusion for the applicant.

Building on the initial findings regarding participating states’ practices and interpretations, participants exchanged expertise and information on the subject of exclusion. Through a panel discussion, participants learned about the relevant institutional arrangements in some participating states, more specifically, the systems of dealing with exclusion considerations in place in Norway, Belgium and the Netherlands were presented. Furthermore, in terms of quality tools and mechanisms relevant to exclusion, the Netherlands content expert on the EASO training curriculum module on ‘Exclusion’, presented the module as one of the key tools to support participating states in achieving common quality in the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). UNHCR shared its guidelines and approach to the application of exclusion clauses, as well as their views on the respective provisions of the EU legal framework. The Hungarian Office of Immigration and Nationality presented an interpretation and its approach to the application of Article 1D of the Geneva Convention which deals with the status of refugees to Palestinian refugees. The Swedish Migration Board delivered a presentation on its practice with regard to exclusion in the resettlement context.

It is also important to mention that on 10-11 December 2013 a meeting of the EASO National Contact Points on Quality, was held in Malta. The meeting focused on exchange of information regarding quality tools and mechanisms, evaluation of the activities under the quality matrix in 2013, and strategic planning for the work on quality in 2014 and beyond. The meeting aimed at a wide participation of the National Contact Points on Quality and other State representatives involved in the national quality systems.

The quality matrix activities will continue in 2014-2015 with a strengthened focus on development of practical tools on the basis of the collected comprehensive information, identified good practices, and valuable expertise from participating states.

Exchange of letters between EASO and the International Association of Refugee Law Judges (IARLJ)

Following the formalisation of EASO cooperation with the Association of European Administrative Judges (AEAJ) in September 2013 (see EASO newsletter for September 2013), on 31 October 2013, EASO formalised its cooperation with the International Association of Refugee Law Judges (IARLJ). A long standing member of EASO’s Consultative Forum, the IARLJ is a well-established and experienced association of independent judges with an extended and wide membership among EU Member States, under the coordination of the IARLJ European Chapter. In accordance with its constitution, the IARLJ seeks to foster recognition that protection from persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion is an individual right established under international law, and that the determination of refugee status and its cessation should be subject to the rule of law.

The IARLJ and EASO have developed fruitful exchanges and cooperation since the start of EASO’s activities in 2011, particularly, in the field of training, practical cooperation and exchange of information on jurisprudence. The IARLJ, together with a newly established network of European and Member States’ courts and tribunals and the Association of European Administrative Judges, will continue to play a key role in the development and implementation of EASO’s professional development activities.
# EASO Training Curriculum 2014 Plan (for trainer courses)

## Target group and Location:
The courses are aimed at trainers who will deliver national training on the EASO training modules. All trainings will be in English. Face-to-face sessions are planned to be held in Malta.

## Costs:
There are no fees for the training, but participants have to cover their own costs for travel and accommodation. All participants should book their travels and accommodation **only after final confirmation from EASO** to avoid cancellations!

## Subscription:
Please send your subscriptions to training@easo.europa.eu as soon as possible, and no later than the dates indicated above.

### Table of Trainings and Dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Start of online studies</th>
<th>Face-to-face dates (including 1.5 days training on didactics and online coaching)</th>
<th>Registration deadline</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td>10 February 2014 20-30 hours</td>
<td>11-14 March 2014</td>
<td>27 January 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interviewing Children</td>
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<td>11-14 March 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dublin III. Regulation</td>
<td>3 March 2014 20-30 hours</td>
<td>01-04 April 2014</td>
<td>17 February 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evidence Assessment</td>
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<td>01-04 April 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Common European Asylum System</td>
<td>7 April 2014 20-30 hours</td>
<td>05-08 May 2014</td>
<td>24 March 2014</td>
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<td>Interview Techniques</td>
<td>7 April 2014 20-30 hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drafting and Decision Making</td>
<td>12 May 2014 20-30 hours</td>
<td>10-13 June 2014</td>
<td>28 April 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Module for Managers</td>
<td>8 September 2014 20-30 hours</td>
<td>7-10 October 2014</td>
<td>22 August 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>International Refugee Law and Human Rights</td>
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<td>7-10 October 2014</td>
<td>22 August 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interviewing Vulnerable Persons</td>
<td>13 October 2014 20-30 hours</td>
<td>11-14 November 2014</td>
<td>29 September 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>End of Protection / Exclusion1</td>
<td>17 November 2014 15-20 hours</td>
<td>16-19 December 2014</td>
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<td>TBC2</td>
<td>17 November 2014 20-30 hours</td>
<td>16-19 December 2014</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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1. To be decided upon consultation with MS during the EASO Training NCP meeting in May 2014
2. To be decided upon consultation with MS during the EASO Training NCP meeting in May 2014
### EASO Vacancies
EASO has recently published the following vacancies:

#### Open Calls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference Number</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Closing date</th>
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<tr>
<td>EASO/2013/TA/009</td>
<td>Training, Quality and Expertise Officer (AD 7)</td>
<td>7 January 2014</td>
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#### Seconded National Experts (only for EU Member States Government Officials)

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<th>Title</th>
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<tr>
<td>EASO/2013/SNE/007</td>
<td>Reception Expert</td>
<td>8 January 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>EASO/2013/SNE/008</td>
<td>Asylum Processes Expert</td>
<td>8 January 2014</td>
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</table>

For more information please visit [www.easo.europa.eu](http://www.easo.europa.eu) and select ‘working for EASO’.

### QUOTE OF THE MONTH

About the identification and verification of acts of persecution cited by individual seekers for international protection:

‘**EASO must be used increasingly so that, among others, the practical cooperation between the Member States is strengthened**’

Professor Emeritus Waldemar Hummer on 19 November 2013 for EU-Infothek (translated)

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