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## **Press Release: EASO Consultative Forum in Athens attracts over 200 members of Civil Society Organisations and individuals**

On 28-29 November 2016, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) holds its sixth Consultative Forum plenary meeting. The aim of the event, which is organised annually, is to discuss ideas and experience from Civil Society, relevant to EASO's work, in particular, the hotspots. For the first time, this meeting is held in Athens, Greece, in order to facilitate the participation of actors operating in the field of asylum and reception in Greece. New is also the adoption of a fully participatory format, which aims to result in an authentic dialogue, and offer the participants the opportunity to proactively engage, contribute to the agenda setting, and share ideas.

The meeting was opened by the European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, Dimitris Avramopoulos. Some of Europe's most notable and active actors in the field of asylum will address the forum, including EASO Executive Director Jose Carreira, UNHCR Director of the Bureau for Europe Vincent Cochetel, the Director of the Greek Asylum Service Maria Stavropoulou, and ECRE Secretary General Catherine Wollard.

Commissioner Avramopoulos said: "If we want to address the refugee crisis in all its aspects, we need a whole of society approach – and civil society plays a crucial role. This is why it is so important for all stakeholders to come together to reflect on how we can make these synergies work better, and how the challenges of the refugee crisis can be addressed for the frontline Member States, the migrants arriving, and the operational partners working on the ground. The European Asylum Support Office has a unique mandate and coordinating role to precisely make this happen, and we plan to strengthen this even more with our proposed reform."

Greek Vice Minister for Migration Policy Balafas held that "It is a pleasure to have the EASO Consultative Forum for the first time held in Athens, as this forum provides a platform for civil society organisations to vent their opinions and ideas. I very much commend EASO's standing practice of consulting civil society. Obtaining the opinion of civil society is of greatest importance when developing and refining working procedures. And not only EASO benefits from the input of civil society, but also the Greek authorities are listening carefully and taking note of what they have to say."

Commenting on the forum, EASO's Executive Director Jose Carreira said: "We welcome and strongly encourage input from Civil Society into our activities. An open door policy towards Civil Society can only enrich us and enable us to continuously improve. That's why we have organised today's Forum in a fully participatory format, to allow Civil Society to raise awareness on emerging issues, to listen to what Civil Society considers gaps in our response, to network, to engage and to explore and build greater synergies with and amongst Civil Society. We have seen today a welcome increase in the number of participants to our forum, which shows great interest in our work and commitment to contribute to the collective knowledge we all need to better face the multiple global challenges of the current high migration pressure."

This year's edition will be attended by about 200 participants from 26 EU+ countries and 8 third countries representing widely civil society. The meeting is steered by a hosting team of professionals skilled in participatory techniques and graphic recording; a marketplace of ideas hosts info stands and a side cultural event will close the first day, listening to the refugee women of the play "The Journey continues". During the

forum, the participants will share best practices related to the practical implementation of the Relocation programme and the hotspot approach. Further, they will also debate on how to consistently communicate and inform refugees and citizens in a multi-actor context, and will discuss the challenges to deal with vulnerable groups in the context of a high influx. Moreover, participants will have the opportunity to learn about key EASO tools or share their experience about them.

During breakout sessions, participants will discuss their ideas around these themes, which will feed into the closing panel debate. Focus of this debate will be the challenges faced in 2016, the developments and ways ahead to further strengthen synergies between institutional actors and civil society in their joint effort to address the migratory crisis.

## **Background**

The Consultative Forum provides an important venue for debate, exchange of information and pooling of knowledge between EASO and relevant stakeholders from Civil Society. It is open to civil society organisations, individuals operating in the field of asylum at different levels (local, national, European and international), and representatives of refugees communities. EU Member States Asylum authorities, representatives of EU institutions and International Organisations, representatives from local municipalities, and a limited number of civil society representatives from non-EU countries are also invited. EASO addresses the members of the Consultative Forum on various topics identified as priorities for EASO's work.

The Consultative Forum is part of EASO's comprehensive effort to bolster enhanced dialogue with actors from Civil Society and to promote increased involvement of civil society in its operational activities. EASO aims to strengthen its feedback system, to develop more sound responsiveness towards organizations responding to its consultations, to provide more information bilaterally and multilaterally to Civil Society Organizations approaching EASO, and to take into account information and inputs provided by civil society, with a view to identify opportunities to build practical cooperation.

Although EASO regularly consults various Civil Society organisations throughout the year, its plenary meeting has become a major event in its calendar of stakeholder activities, attracting around hundred participants, most of whom are NGOs working in the field of asylum and reception.

For more information on EASO's Consultative Forum activities you can consult <https://www.easo.europa.eu/2016-consultative-forum>

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