CALL FOR INPUT TO THE 2016 ANNUAL REPORT ON THE SITUATION OF ASYLUM IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

One of EASO’s key tasks is to produce an Annual Report on the Situation of Asylum in the European Union (EU) with an overview of key aspects of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). This includes comprehensive analysis of relevant statistics, as well as information on important asylum-related developments at EU and national level on the practical functioning of the CEAS.

As an independent centre of expertise, EASO tries to make the report as comprehensive and accurate as possible, taking into account information available from a wide range of sources. The 2015 Annual Report made several references to civil society sources, contributing significantly to the overall quality and value of the report. This year civil-society organisations are invited to contribute once again, as are individuals such as lawyers, academics and any persons who may have invaluable insights to share.

The structure of the input should be as follows: indicate the theme you are commenting on; formulate observations in a concise manner; provide references to any studies or reports and include any background information.

Please email contributions to: ids@easo.europa.eu; consultative-forum@easo.europa.eu by 20 February 2016.

Previous Annual Reports can be found on EASO’s website: https://www.easo.europa.eu/information-analysis/annual-report

EASO WILL CONTINUE TO PROVIDE CHILD FRIENDLY & EFFICIENT ASYLUM PROCEDURES

On 27 January, EASO’s Executive Director attended the Lost in Migration Conference. This conference was organised in cooperation with Her Excellency, Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta and her Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society.

During the meeting the Executive Director stressed that EASO is committed to promote the highest standards in asylum and reception for those children who find themselves in need of international protection.

EASO will continue to collaborate with all stakeholders in order to make child-friendly and efficient asylum procedures a reality throughout the EU.

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NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION IN THE EU+

In December 2016, EU+ countries recorded 64,513 applications for international protection. This marked the fourth consecutive month of decrease in numbers of applications lodged in the EU+ and the lowest monthly total since May 2015. Compared to December 2015 the number of asylum applicants this month was 43% lower. During 2016, 1,234,558 applications have been recorded in the EU+. 8% fewer than in 2015 when 1,354,984 applications were lodged.

The share of repeated applications (having previously lodged an application in the same EU+ country) rose slightly from 6% in November to 6.6% in December. 4% of all applicants claimed to be unaccompanied minors (UAMs) when lodging an application. 18% of all UAM applicants were Afghan citizens, 13% Eritreans and 8% Pakistani.

MAIN COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN OF APPLICANTS

Syria and Afghanistan remained the main citizenships of applicants in December 2016. The third top country of origin changed compared to previous month as Iraq replaced Nigeria. Syria has been the main citizenship of applicants since April 2015. In December 2016, EU+ countries recorded 9,661 Syrian applications, 15% less than in the previous month (11,423). The number of Afghan applicants also decreased, to 5,341 from 7,238. Compared to the previous month Iraqis lodged 15% fewer applications at only 4,432. These top-three citizenships together accounted for 30% of all applications lodged in the EU+.

Nigeria with 4,210 applicants ranked fourth position while the top 10 list of applicants citizenships for December was completed by Eritrea (3,475) Pakistan (2,688), Albania (2,473), Iran (1,769), Guinea (1,555) and Russia (1,548). The number of applicants from all top ten citizenship groups decreased compared to November 2016, with the largest decreases observed among citizens from Afghanistan and Nigeria (-26% and -25%, respectively).

Syria – In December 2016, Syria remained the main country of origin of applicants for international protection in the EU+ with 9,661 applications. This was 15% fewer than the number of Syrian applications recorded in November and the lowest number since April 2015. In December the Syrians constituted only 15% of applications. Syrian applicants remained widespread throughout the EU+ with 19 EU+ countries reporting Syrian nationals among their top-three citizenships of applicants.

Afghanistan – Afghanistan was in second place of the citizenships with most applicants for the ninth consecutive month. The numbers however fell for the fourth consecutive month, with a drop of 26% to 5,341 applications in December. This was the lowest number since May 2015. Afghanistan remained the main citizenship of claimed UAMs (18%). 11 EU+ countries reported Afghan applicants in their national top-three citizenships.

Iraq – In December 2016, the number of Iraqi applicants decreased by 15% to 4,432. 13 EU+ countries counted Iraqi applicants among the top-three citizenships.
NUMBER AND TYPE OF DECISIONS ISSUED IN FIRST INSTANCE IN EU+ COUNTRIES

In December 2016, EU+ countries issued 115,197 first-instance decisions, about 11% fewer than in November 2016 when the highest level since the start of EPS monthly data collection in 2014 was recorded. Still it was 56% more in comparison to the same period in previous year, demonstrating the increased decision-making capacity implemented in a number of EU+ countries.

The EU+ recognition rate reached 52% in December, one percentage point lower than in the previous month. More positive decisions granted refugee status (53%) than subsidiary protection (47% of all positive decisions). 26% of all decisions were issued to Syrian applicants, namely 29,443 decisions, 25% fewer than in the previous month. For the third consecutive month the recognition rate for Syrian applicants remained at 97%, with a majority of positive decisions granting subsidiary protection (63%) rather than refugee status (37%).

The number of decisions issued to Afghan applicants remained stable. The recognition rate for Afghan nationals was on the same level as in the previous month: 33%. Of total positive decisions, 58% resulted in refugee status and 42% in subsidiary protection, with an increasing proportion for refugee status throughout the past year. The number of decisions on Iraqi applications increased by 5% to 15,290, with a 65% recognition rate.

Most Iraqi applicants were issued refugee status (73% of all positive decisions). Of 10 citizenships with the most first-instance decisions issued, Eritrea showed the second highest recognition rate (93%). The lowest recognition rates were observed for Albanian (3%), Pakistani (9%) and Nigerian (12%) applicants.

CASES AWAITING A FIRST-INSTANCE DECISION

For the third consecutive month in 2016, the number of cases awaiting a first-instance decision decreased by 7% to 874,693. This slight decrease in pending cases is explained by the continued high number of first-instance decisions issued, combined with a lower number of applications lodged. 56% of all cases were pending for longer than six months. The applicants awaiting first instance decision for longer than six months were mainly coming from Afghanistan (27% of total), Iraq (13%) and Syria (10%).

SOCIAL MEDIA MONITORING

As of January 2017, EASO has stated to take over the social media monitoring service, previously done by UNHCR and will start issuing a weekly social media monitoring report.

When UNHCR started the regular monitoring of social media in the languages of the largest refugee population in March 2016, this was originally done on a temporary basis. It was meant as preparatory research for designing information strategies. However, the results proved so useful to so many stakeholders in Europe that social media monitoring became a regular project in itself.

As the findings are of particular interest to asylum practitioners in EU Member States, it was decided to gradually transfer the service to EASO. Over the next three months, it is going to be a joint project, co-financed by UNHCR and EASO.

Two UNHCR staff members moved to Malta to establish the service and train incoming staff. As of April social media monitoring will be taken over completely by EASO.
A welcome change: the newly adopted participatory format of EASO’s 6th Consultative Forum meeting was highly appreciated by participants and largely contributed to the meetings’ positive assessment.

EASO held its 6th plenary Consultative Forum Meeting in Athens on 28-29 November 2016 (see also the November Newsletter). In comparison to previous years, the 6th edition was marked by certain changes. Not only did it attract a record number of over 200 participants from civil society, it was also for the first time held in Athens in order to facilitate access for practitioners working on the ground in the hotspots. In addition, the most important change in the 6th edition was its format; fully participatory, designed and implemented by professionals specialised in participatory leadership.

With a view of improving future plenary meetings, the 6th edition was evaluated to identify any lessons learned/points for improvement. The evaluation consisted of an analysis of the anonymous evaluation forms as completed by participants at the end of the meeting, a debriefing meeting with the team of facilitators, as well as a focus group discussion with EASO staff who had participated in the forum.

The results of the evaluation indicate that the meeting fully met participants’ expectations; the content was regarded as useful and the participatory format, in particular, was considered as a very welcome change.

“The meeting had an interesting new approach characterised by successful implementation of participatory methods. I greatly appreciated the informal working method of the meeting, particularly the breakout sessions and the ‘you create the agenda session’, which allowed participants to discuss topics of their own concern. This enabled a very open and constructive dialogue”.

- said one participant

Similar observations were made by other participants, with many stressing their high appreciation for the format. The word cloud below visualises participants’ feelings at the end of the meeting. Though the majority of participants felt satisfied, suggestions for further improvements were also made. These included, for example, the need to involve more refugees as well as promoting further active participation from representatives of the Commission and national governments with a view of bridging gaps between decision-makers and civil society.

Some participants further emphasised the necessity to now “translate words into actions”. As such, EASO would like to stress its commitment to ensure an appropriate follow-up to the Consultative Forum. To this purpose, an internal process has been launched which aims to identify concrete actions and next steps to be taken. Suggestions for action by EASO were many, however, as explained at the plenary by EASO’s Executive Director, “only those relevant to the mandate of EASO can be translated into direct action”.

Internal consultations are ongoing and examples of actions under consideration include:

• Further strengthening consultations with civil society in relation to e.g. key EASO documents, training modules/material, practical tools, COI products and methodologies, ensuring that appropriate feedback is given;
• Possibility of civil society representatives participating in EASO training sessions (if places are available and for those modules relevant to CSOs);
• Exploring innovative methods for communication including via social media;
• Promoting intercultural awareness skills;
• Supporting Member States to better attend to the needs of vulnerable persons;
• Encouraging a more effective two-way dialogue with CSOs on EASO’s operational activities;

The final selection of actions is envisaged to be codified in an Action Plan, which EASO aims to implement by the end of 2017.
In the last two years, asylum, migration, refugees, relocation, resettlement, can be considered key words on the international press agenda. Messages and realities presented by media have the power to shape behaviours, to shape destinies, to create paradigm shifts, and to influence decisions on a very personal level. All these facts have brought into the spotlight the issue of the ethics in the news.

From this perspective, and knowing the actuality on the ground, from the places where persons in need of protection are first in contact with the EU authorities, EASO supports high quality journalism, implicitly telling the real story. This support is materialized in being a partner within the Migration Media Award, a concrete initiative which aims to encourage qualitative and evidence-based journalism on migration.

It is a joint activity led by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) and the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Malta, the EMM4 programme, and the EU-funded Open Media Hub (OMH) project.

As an important actor of European solidarity, joining as a key partner, the media award competition fits into EASO’s media outreach and engagement to support the authentic narrative about migration, to bring facts and reality in the spotlight.

On the 25th of January, the first edition of the Euro-Mediterranean Media Award Competition has been announced in Brussels during the event entitled Towards a balanced narrative on migration in the Mediterranean, organized under the auspice of the Maltese Presidency of the EU, and bringing together policy makers, media managers and journalists as well as migration and communication experts.

In concrete terms, EASO’s support and involvement in the Media Award initiative will consist in providing its expertise, promoting the award via EASO’s website and social media, and contributing to the development of communication materials.

Also, EASO will publicise the award to important press outlets and media contacts, acting in the migration and home affairs domain, and it will be represented in the Steering Group. Moreover, EASO will, together with all partners, jointly host the award ceremony in Malta in June 2017.

The Migration Media Award will recognise and reward the excellence, relevance and newsworthiness of up to 36 journalism pieces dealing with migration in the Euro-Mediterranean region in all its aspects. The award consists of winning an EU-funded contract to produce a new original, more detailed, more researched content covering a topic in relation to migration in the Euro-Mediterranean area.

Selection of the 36 winning entries and pitches will be made through a three tier process: first an eligibility check, then content evaluation and scoring and finally, selection and contracting of winners among the top scored entries by the Award Partners’ Steering Committee. Funding of the award will be provided and approved by DG NEAR.

Copyright of all 36 winning entries, and of the 36 new original award-funded work, based on a three-month production period, will be shared with the European Commission.

More details can be found here: http://www.migration-media-award.eu/
First EASO Training on the Reception of Unaccompanied Children

On 19 and 20 of January 2017, EASO organised a training on the reception of unaccompanied children in Bologna implemented under the EASO Operating plan to Italy signed on 22nd of December 2016.

The training was organised in cooperation with the Italian Ministry of Interior, Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration, and was attended by representatives from the prefettura of Bologna, Ravenna, Firenze, Torino and Genova, as well as representatives of centres for the first reception of unaccompanied children set up under the EU Fund for Asylum Migration and Integration (AMIF), Italian’s second line reception system Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati (SPRAR), and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The first day of the training focused on several aspects linked to the reception of unaccompanied children, including an introduction into the international and EU legal framework for reception; the identification of vulnerable persons and unaccompanied children in general and through the use of the EASO tool for the Identification of Persons with Special Needs (ipsn.easo.europa.eu). EASO experts from Fedasil (Belgium) and the Swedish Migration Agency (Sweden) also presented the case of other EU member states that have recently experienced a situation of high influx, specifically of unaccompanied children.

On the second day of the training, UNHCR presented the benchmarks on the identification and assessment of the best interests of the child in the context of international protection and SPRAR (Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati) presented the current set up of the system as well as referral procedures from first reception to SPRAR (Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati) structures.

The two-day event offered an excellent opportunity for practitioners from public and private structures from different regions in Northern Italy to exchange about current experiences, including good practices and challenges. Moreover, it allowed to discussed the current challenging context for reception in Italy in light of the continuously high influx and identify concrete solutions on issues such as age assessment, legal guardianship or trafficking among several stakeholders concerned.

The training represented the first of a series of regional trainings that will be organised by EASO in Italy, with more trainings to follow in February in Napoli, in March in Bari and in April in Catania to cover actors active in the reception of unaccompanied minors in different regions of Italy.

EASO Trains Medical Officers

A training on Medico-Legal Documentation of Torture for Asylum Procedures addressing medical officers was organised by EASO in cooperation with the Cyprus Ministry of Health and the International Rehabilitation Council for the Torture Victims (IRCT) in Nicosia on 24-25-26 January 2017.

The program, starting from the current national law and the procedures for medico-legal evaluations, presents the Istanbul protocol and the techniques for interviewing torture victims, as well as the physical and psychological evidences of torture. Exploring the principles for documentation and reporting, the program include both theoretical and practical approach, i.e. the Forensic Photography Workshop, the Interviewing & History-Taking Workshop and the Medico-Legal Reporting Workshop.

Two others complementary sessions will be organised for other stakeholders next February.
ANNUAL COORDINATION AND PLANNING MEETING (ACPM)

On 16th January 2017, representatives of the EASO Network of Court and Tribunal Members came together at EASO to discuss the activities which EASO will undertake in 2017 in support of Members of Courts and Tribunals in the EU+ countries.

This network is a key partner as it contains representatives of all EU+ countries as well as other important partners such as judicial associations - Association of European Administrative Judges (AEAJ) and International Association of Refugee Law Judges (IARLJ), Academy of European Law (ERA) and European Judicial Training Network (EJTN).

Aside from providing valuable input for the activities forthcoming in 2017, the network serves, inter alia, to guarantee full respect for the principle of judicial independence.

This year’s ACPM focussed on finding ways to implement EASO’s Professional Development Series for Members of Courts and Tribunals. Discussions focussed on the remaining materials to be developed but also on the feasibility of developing a trainers’ pool and identifying a distribution strategy to ensure the materials reach their intended target audience.

As has become tradition, and in order to mark the publication of a new Judicial Analysis on the subject, a thematic workshop was organised on the second day of the meeting on the topic of ending international protection.

This included a moot court exercise, which was managed by Judges Sebastian Baer (DE) and Bernard Dawson (UK). The moot court materials will be included in a forthcoming Judicial Trainer Guidance Note on this subject.

COI WORKING GROUP FOR MEMBERS OF COURTS AND TRIBUNALS

On 23 January 2017, EASO launched a call for expressions of interest from experts willing to collaborate on the development of practical materials on the subject of country-of-origin information.

The materials to be developed will provide practical support to members of courts and tribunals who are obliged to research and assess COI.

They will focus on research methods and database usage in identifying COI. They will also provide guidance to judicial users on steps that can be taken towards assessing the relevance and reliability of COI.

Further information can be obtained by contacting: judicialtraining@easo.europa.eu

EASO’S SUPPORT TO COURTS AND TRIBUNALS
BRUSSELS BASED PRESS VISITED EASO - 11 JANUARY

Under the auspice of the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the EU, an important number of accredited members of the Brussels based press visited Malta between 10 - 14 January 2017. On 11 January the group visited EASO.

The whole trip was organized mainly around Q&A’s and discussions together with Ministers of the Maltese Government, Maltese Prime Minister and EASO’s management team. They attended activities held by the Maltese EU Presidency together with the European Commission.

While visiting EASO they were briefed about the main functions of EASO, operational activities in Greece and Italy, as well as about the main challenges EASO has to face while supporting Member States to cope better with the migration challenges. Another interesting topic referred to the future of EASO, becoming in the near future a fully-fledged Agency, with enhanced mandate and increased operational capacity.

Moreover, journalists showed a keen interest on the latest asylum trends.

BILATERAL MEETING WITH GERMAN MINISTER OF STATE FOR EUROPE, MICHAEL ROTH AND THE FRENCH MINISTER FOR EUROPEAN AFFAIRS, HARLEM DÉSIR VISIT EASO - 23 JANUARY

BELGIAN EASO EMPLOYEES MEET BELGIAN MINISTER THEO FRANCKEN - 26 JANUARY

BULGARIAN EASO EMPLOYEES MEET BULGARIAN DEPUTY MINISTER PHILIP GOUNEV - 27 JANUARY

SENATE OF THE CZECH PARLIAMENT VISIT EASO - 23 JANUARY
UPCOMING EVENTS

- **EASO-FRONTEX Management Board Meeting and the 23rd EASO Management Board meeting**
  
- **SCIFA Meeting**

VACANCIES

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<tr>
<th>Reference Nr.</th>
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<td>6 Feb 2017 - 13:00 Brussels time</td>
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