

Press Release

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EASO and Bulgaria sign agreement to continue EASO support to Bulgaria until June 2016

EASO and Bulgaria signed today a [Special Support Plan](#) which provides for EASO tailor-made support to Bulgaria to be implemented over a period of 18 months. The support focuses on ensuring the long-term sustainability of the good results already achieved within the scope of the [EASO Operating Plan for Bulgaria](#) (October 2013 – October 2014). This continued support will emphasise on institutional capacity building, quality assurance mechanisms and responding to the special needs of vulnerable groups.

Due to the continued high pressure on the Bulgarian asylum and reception system, Bulgaria has asked for continued support in order to improve its asylum and reception system in line with requirements of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). In this context, on 8 October 2014, Bulgaria made an official request for further EASO support. Based on this request, as well as the recommendations contained in the evaluation of the [EASO Operating Plan for Bulgaria](#), the EASO Executive Director decided to extend EASO support to Bulgaria.

Dr Robert K. Visser, Executive Director of EASO, and Minister Veselin Vuchkov, Bulgarian Minister for the Interior, signed today the EASO Special Support Plan for Bulgaria. The Special Support Plan will be implemented over a period of 18 months ending in June 2016. EASO will continue to support the efforts of Bulgaria in improving and strengthening its strategic management as well as upgrading the standards of its asylum and reception system in the context of the implementation of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). **14 new EASO measures** will focus on support with the identification, referral and procedure safeguards for vulnerable groups; reception and social activities; training and coaching in several areas; and quality assurance and contingency planning. Joint Special Support Teams made up of EASO experts, experts from Member States and Bulgarian Officials will be set up to collaborate on these endeavors.

Following the signature of this ‘Special Support Plan’, Dr Visser noted that: *‘Despite the continuing asylum flows pressure on the country, Bulgaria has significantly improved its reception and asylum determination system over the past year with the support of Member States and EASO. After the successful implementation of the [Operating Plan](#), it is now time to focus on the long-term sustainability of the good results achieved so far. The Special Support Plan provides an opportunity to strengthen the existing capacities and build up a more robust and high quality asylum system. Following the excellent and dedicated cooperation of our Bulgarian partner authorities, I am convinced that this Special Support Plan will be able to fulfil its goals and be another example of successful practical solidarity.’*

EASO support complements other support measures by the European Commission to Bulgaria, such as emergency funding in the field of asylum under the envelope of the SOLID Programme. In addition, EASO cooperates closely with UNHCR in the implementation of the plan.

Background

EASO support to Bulgaria dates back to October 2013. Due to a high increase in the influx of asylum seekers, in particular in the number of asylum seekers from Syria, Bulgaria's asylum and reception system has come under serious pressure. In this context, on 14 October 2013 Bulgaria made an official request for EASO support. Based on the actual situation in Bulgaria, the EASO Executive Director decided to provide immediate support to Bulgaria via the joint expertise of EASO and Member States. In this context, the [EASO Operating Plan for Bulgaria](#) ran until October 2014, and focused on a number of prioritised areas, such as: identification and pre-registration of mixed migration flows; registration of asylum seekers and referral of unaccompanied minors and vulnerable persons to the appropriate asylum procedure; supporting the asylum decision process; providing Country of Origin Information; delivering core training in EASO Curriculum Modules for newly hired staff and; offering expertise on the absorption of emergency financial support to Bulgaria under EU Funds(SOLID Programme). The plan aimed at helping Bulgaria cope with the increase in influx while at the same time improving and strengthening the Bulgarian asylum and reception system, in the context of implementation of the instruments of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS).

The [Special Support Plan](#) signed today follows the recommendations contained in the evaluation of the [EASO Operating Plan for Bulgaria](#) and provides for EASO support until June 2016.

Quick Links

EASO's Special Support Plan for Bulgaria: <http://easo.europa.eu/wp-content/uploads/SSP-BG-2014-12-03.pdf>

EASO's stock-taking report: <http://easo.europa.eu/wp-content/uploads/EASO-Report-stock-taking-mission-to-Bulgaria-final-.pdf>.

EASO Operational Plan for Bulgaria: <http://easo.europa.eu/wp-content/uploads/Operating-Plan-Bulgaria-SIGNED.pdf>.

Any further information may be obtained from the European Asylum Support Office by contacting Mr Jean-Pierre Schembri on the following e-mail address: jean-pierre.schembri@easo.europa.eu