



European Asylum Support Office Newsletter — January/February 2013

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the January/February edition of the European Asylum Support Office newsletter. In this edition we shall focus on EASO's activities for this year. 2013 is expected to be a busy year for EASO. In this edition, we try to illustrate how EASO will be contributing to the implementation of the Common European Asylum System in 2013. Moreover, on page 2, we provide an overview of EASO's activities in Greece. We also look at upcoming activities related to EASO training. In this context, on page 4 you will find a full list of EASO training courses which will be held during the year. It is also important to note that this month, EASO has launched its redesigned website. I would like to invite you to visit www.easo.europa.eu.

Jean-Pierre Schembri
Newsletter Editor
EASO Spokesperson

IN THE NEWS: 10th EASO Management Board elects new Chair



10th EASO Management Board family picture

On 4/5 February 2013, EASO's Management Board held its 10th meeting. The EASO Management Board is made up of representatives of the EU Member States, the European Commission and UNHCR. **The meeting was of particular importance since it elected a new EASO Management Board chairperson, Mag. Wolfgang Taucher (Austria).** Moreover, this was the first Management Board meeting held at the new state of the art EASO conference facilities which are situated at the EASO headquarters at the Valletta harbour (Malta).

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IN THE NEWS: EASO and the 2013 asylum package

The EU constitutes a single area where the right to asylum should be upheld by a Common European Asylum System (CEAS), ensuring uniform statuses, high common standards of protection and common features in asylum procedures for those in need of international protection.

The CEAS is based on a set of common legal instruments (the “EU asylum acquis”) and on the enhancement of practical cooperation, responsibility and solidarity among EU Member States. In line with the Stockholm Programme, the adoption of the five second phase instruments laying the legal foundations of CEAS will be completed in early 2013.

One of the main challenges of such a system is establishing a high level of practical cooperation among Member States. In this context, EASO was set up with the aim of facilitating, coordinating and strengthening such practical cooperation among Member States and help to increase coordination of operational cooperation between Member States so that the common rules are implemented effectively so that Member States are better able to provide international protection to those entitled, while dealing fairly and efficiently with those who do not qualify for international protection.

Notwithstanding the specific timelines for applicability and transposition foreseen for the different legal instruments of the new asylum acquis, the coming years will see EASO playing a key role in supporting Member States in the implementation of the revised legal instruments through its vast array of tools.

Read more on EASO's contribution to the implementation of the new asylum package in 2013 on page 5/6.

Offering Emergency Support – Looking into EASO Activities in Greece



Greece has faced particular asylum pressures in the past years due to a significant influx of irregular migrants at the European external borders. Following a request made by the Greek Government, in February 2011, EASO agreed to support Greece and to deploy Asylum Support Teams (ASTs) to Greece, for the implementation of efficient asylum procedures and standards, consistent with the goals of the Greek Action Plan on the Management of Migration Flows and the Reform of the Asylum System.

EASO offers emergency support in Greece in close cooperation with FRONTEX, the European Commission, EU Taskforce and UNHCR. On top of this, EASO financed a support project, agreed upon in November 2012, which supports Greece to reduce the backlog of asylum cases. Since the beginning of its operations in Greece in 2011, EASO has deployed over 65 ASTs to support Greece with building up a new asylum system. A scoreboard assessing the impact of the products and results of the EASO Asylum Support Teams deployed in Greece since May 2011 was presented to the EASO Management Board in February 2012.

At the request of the Greek Minister of Public Order and Citizen Protection in January 2013, in conjunction with the implementation of new procedures as identified in the Revised Greek Action Plan on Asylum and Migration Management, EASO decided to continue the deployment of ASTs and technical and operational assistance in Greece, in order to increase their capacity to deal with the institutional reform regarding asylum, screening and reception centers. Solid investments of Member States have been managed and implemented by EASO. The deployment of Asylum Support Teams represent an expression of solidarity by the EU Member States towards Greece. Its also demonstrate a belief that an investment in Greece is an investment in the Common European Asylum System, which is for the benefit of all the Member States.

EASO products in Greece

EASO products in Greece include:

- Continuous training of all staff;
- Providing expert advise on asylum issues;
- Recommendations and production of manuals on operational procedures;
- Primary documentation support:
- Advice on EU funding.

EASO's support to Greece is focused on maintaining Greek ownership, combined with a flexible, tailor-made and timely approach. A strong political commitment from the Greek side in the implementation of the Operating Plan further highlights this approach. Nowadays, the revised Action Plan of Greece in the field of asylum and migration provides an updated umbrella for future EASO support to Greece.

EASO deliverables in Greece

EASO has supported Greece via the Operating Plan, comprising:

- reduction of the backlog
- improved registration of asylum claims;
- building up the new First Reception service, Asylum Service and Appeals Authority;
- guaranteeing the quality of the asylum and reception process, via training, registration and analysis, primary documentation, guidelines and manuals;
- capacity-building of protection and referral of vulnerable groups;
- support in the field of EU funding, etc.

EASO Training

Overview of EASO training in 2013

Throughout 2013, EASO will continue to provide Member States with train-the-trainer sessions in all EAC modules. EASO is planning to organise **13 to 14 train-the-trainer sessions** with the face-to-face sessions in Malta. All the face-to-face sessions will be held at EASO's **new training premises**, specifically designed for a variety of training activities.

The first training session to be organised this year is the **Interview Techniques** module, with the on-line phase starting 4 March, followed by the face – to-face session on 25 to 28 March. This module was thoroughly revised in 2012, and will cover the main competencies required for conducting an asylum interview whilst at the same time ensuring consistency and coherency with the other EASO modules, in particular those dealing with interviewing skills.

The 2013 EASO training programme together with the registration deadlines for the entire year can be found on our webpage www.easo.europa.eu

In addition to the organisation of the train-the-trainer courses, EASO will continue **updating** its training materials to ensure that this material is up to date and in line with the latest developments in the asylum field and in particular with the Common European Asylum System.

This year six to eight EAC modules will be updated. Moreover, in 2013 EASO will also engage in the development of **two new training modules** – one specifically designed for managers in the asylum field, and the second one covering the area of resettlement. EASO will also finalize the development of a specific module on the Common European Asylum System. The first training session for this module is scheduled for the end of this year. **See page 4 for a full list of courses.**

New module on the Common European Asylum System



Content Expert Group on CEAS module development, January 2013

EASO is currently working on developing a new module on the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). A content group of five Member State experts from Belgium, Cyprus, Finland, Germany and Poland and an expert from the European Commission are actively working on the content of this module which aims to be ready by the end of the year. The CEAS module will be replacing the previous module Introduction to EU Asylum Law and Policy.

This module will provide the legal framework of the CEAS by focusing on the legal developments in the area of international protection within the European Union. It aims to raise awareness among case officers and other practitioners working in the field of international protection to enable the development of a common understanding of their role as the core actors in the CEAS implementation.

This module will also focus on assisting case officers to develop the required skills in understanding the implementation of the common legal instruments including legal text and jurisprudence, thus contributing to harmonization and a common understanding of the asylum acquis. This module will also assist case officers to understand the role of EASO in helping to improve the implementation of the CEAS.

EASO Trainer courses Modules (2013)

Module	Start of the on-line part	Face-to-face session in Malta	Registration deadline
Interview Techniques	4 March 2013	25-28 March 2013	11 February 2013
Evidence Assessment	11 March, 2013	16-19 April, 2013	18 February, 2013
Inclusion	11 March, 2013	16-19 April, 2013	18 February, 2013
Interviewing Children	22 April, 2013	21-24 May, 2013	8 April, 2013
Dublin Regulation	22 April, 2013	21-24 May, 2013	8 April, 2013
Drafting and Decision Making	13 May, 2013	11-14 June, 2013	2 May, 2013
COI	13 May, 2013	11-14 June, 2013	2 May, 2013
International Refugee Law & Human Rights	9 September, 2013	8-11 October, 2013	20 August 2013
Interviewing Vulnerable Persons	9 September, 2013	8-11 October, 2013	20 August 2013
Exclusion	7 October, 2013	5-8 November, 2013	24 September 2013
Interview Techniques	7 October, 2013	5-8 November, 2013	24 September 2013
End of Protection	4 November, 2013	4-6 December, 2013	22 October 2013
Common European Asylum System	4 November, 2013	3-6 December, 2013	22 October 2013

The priorities for 2013 for EASO are:

1. Provide operational emergency support to the asylum systems in Greece and other Member States in need;
2. Develop a tailor-made EU Early Warning and Preparedness System on Asylum, providing asylum trend analysis and risk scenarios;
3. Further develop high-quality common asylum training across the EU;
4. Provide a common level of Country of Origin Information (COI) across the EU and regular COI reports;
5. Consolidate the EASO organisation.

EASO's support actions, concerning the implementation of the asylum acquis, are carried out in full cooperation with the European Commission, the guardian of the Treaties, and, where relevant, with other EU Agencies and bodies, such as Frontex, FRA and EUROPOL, as well as with UNHCR and other international organisations. EASO consults civil society organisations that form part of its Consultative Forum where specific expertise is required.

EASO has no direct or indirect powers in relation to the taking of decisions by Member States' asylum authorities on individual applications for international protection. In this context, EASO contributes to the implementation of the different instruments of the new asylum package through the following activities:

Training and quality: In 2013 EASO Training modules and materials will be updated to reflect the developments in the new asylum acquis and new ones will be developed. EASO will hold 13 to 14 train-the trainer sessions and train some 160 participants. EASO has started a Quality mapping exercise to obtain comprehensive information about the situation 'on the ground' and facilitate exchange of information, expertise and good practices in the implementation of the CEAS.



EASO training in Greece

EASO will continue to promote **practical cooperation** and the exchange of information and best practices on several issues through workshops (COI, thematic, legal and technical). In 2013 EASO plans to hold 3 to 4 of such workshops.

Provision of common Country of Origin Information is another EASO activity. Country of origin information (COI) refers to information on countries from which asylum seekers originate. This sort of information is essential for asylum officials during the asylum determination process. In the field of COI, EASO gathers targeted, relevant, reliable, accurate and up-to-date Country of Origin Information in a transparent and impartial manner. It also manages and further develops the EU's common COI portal, which provides a common entry point to information and offers additional resources for Member States. In 2013, amongst other things, EASO plans to hold meetings of national COI portal administrators, further develop the COI portal, and finalise and publish at least 2 COI reports.



In 2012 EASO published two COI reports on Afghanistan (above), and a COI Report Methodology

EASO also publishes the Annual Report on the situation of asylum in the EU. The report provides objective, unbiased and balanced information, obtained from a wide variety of relevant and competent sources, highlighting not only good practices, but also challenges and concerns. The report should be issued in the second quarter of 2013.

Moreover, EASO drafts **guidelines and operating manuals** related to the implementation of the asylum acquis i.a. to the internal protection, vulnerable groups, and access to procedures.

EASO is currently developing an **Early warning and Preparedness System (EPS)** aimed at detecting situations likely to give rise to particular asylum pressures. EASO will continue to further develop an EU tailor-made 'Early warning and Preparedness System' on asylum, providing asylum trend analysis and risk scenarios in accordance with the EASO Regulation, as well as in view of the upcoming implementation of the Article 33 of the Dublin Regulation.

Using the Early warning and Preparedness System, EASO provides forecasts of potential flows from third countries. Moreover, constant data collection on asylum from Member States allows for the assessment of the capacity of Member States to cope with the influx of asylum seekers they are receiving, enables the early detection of gaps and needs; thus allowing efficient and timely action. **(for more details on EPS see page 7)**

In 2013, EASO will continue to provide **special support** in the form of targeted measures to Member States with certain identified and specific needs related to their asylum and/or reception systems on the basis of tailor-made plans.

Responding quickly to '**emergency situations**' where Member States are faced with particular pressure on their asylum and reception systems will remain one of EASO's priorities. Over the past year and a half, EASO has provided emergency support to Greece and Luxembourg which have both faced particular pressure on their asylum and/or reception systems.



Picture above shows Dr Visser in discussions with Greek Minister Dendias.

Emergency Support in case of particular pressure in a Member State can only be given on the request of a Member State, and after an assessment of the situation by EASO. Hereto, experts of EU Member States who are part of the so-called Asylum Intervention Pool (a pool of experts from Member States) could be deployed in the EU Member State under particular pressure.

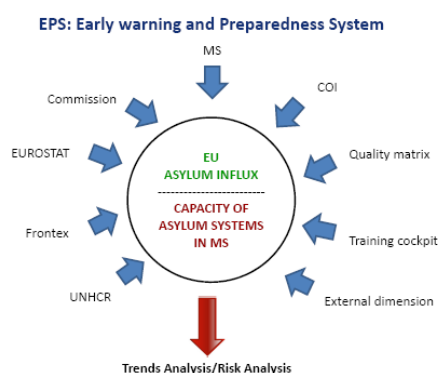
In the area of **unaccompanied minors**, in 2013 EASO plans to issue a handbook on age assessment, hold 3/4 expert meetings on development of family tracing practices, and hold an annual conference on unaccompanied minors.

From the **administration** point of view, in 2013 EASO plans at organising 3 Management Board meetings in Malta. It also plans to conclude a number of working arrangements with associated countries, UNHCR and other EU agencies. Moreover, EASO plans to grow to 77 members of staff.

EASO will also be active in the areas of resettlement, third country support and external dimension. As one can easily deduct from the above, 2013 is expected to be a very push year for EASO.

EASO's Early warning and Preparedness System

In the most recent EASO Management Board meeting, EASO proposed in greater detail how it will develop its Early warning and Preparedness System (EPS). The proposal provides a step-by-step plan for building up EASO's data collection and analysis capacity regarding statistical indicators (both qualitative and quantitative) in the field of asylum, building on its early experience with quarterly and ad hoc analyses, plus the statistics produced by Member States (MS) for EUROSTAT.



Picture above illustrates how EPS works (EASO gathers input from various sources and comes up with analysis and risk assessments)

Collecting statistical data on asylum alone, however, is of little utility if it is not accompanied by knowledge of the systems which produce it. It is essential to build up EASO's knowledge regarding how the asylum systems of MS (from access to procedure to return) are organized in order to better analyse the statistical data provided via a mapping of national systems (organizationally and legally).

While accepting this proviso, it is still necessary to decide upon the most important and effective indicators of change in national systems' ability to deal with flows of asylum seekers over useful timescales. Some asylum activities lend themselves more to this type of analysis than others. Good experience has been gained by EASO already in its work with quick scans and its quarterly report on the state of asylum in the EU, which is communicated regularly to MS, in particular in regard to integration with data already provided by MS to EUROSTAT and Frontex.

But the recent EUROSTAT exercise to update the guidelines on the provision of data under current asylum definitions has revealed some grey areas in interpretation and provision of this data, which must be taken into account by EASO when proposing indicators as part of EPS.

With this in mind, EASO has proposed an initial list of indicators that is as far as possible compatible with EUROSTAT data collection and avoids duplication of work.

In order to be confident of the data gathered and understand the limits of its safe use in analysis, it is essential that those in charge of data collection in MS have a common understanding. To this end, EASO will take advantage of MS' experience by activating a group of persons – the Group for the Provision of Statistics (GPS) – nominated by Member States to be their points of contact in regard to statistical and data-collection questions.

This GPS will meet soon in order to discuss their role, the proposed indicators, and to provide information on the feasibility of such data collection for MS. The GPS will operate in a similar way as the Frontex Risk Analysis Network (FRAN) built by Frontex to ensure reliability of data and which has been key to improving knowledge of MS organization and capacity-building in the statistical realm.

Once the three parts of the system proposed above have been put into place, EASO is confident that the beginnings of an effective early-warning system will have been established providing ready access to regular comparable data across all EU MS regarding the key aspects of flows and national preparedness; timely and accurate analyses from EASO based on a thorough understanding of the differences and similarities in national asylum systems; enhanced ability on EASO's part to raise important issues directly with concerned MS and offer tailored support; significant harmonization and capacity-building in the field of asylum data-collection and analysis plus enhanced monitoring of the progress towards effective implementation of the Common European Asylum System.

First National COI Portal Administrators Meeting

The Common Country of Origin Information (COI) portal was built to enable asylum officials to access a wide range of COI from a single point of entry. Therefore, the Portal allows connection of the official COI databases owned by Member States and associated Countries to a single web application, while allowing Member States which do not have web based systems to upload and share COI documents into a local dedicated area called the 'Upload Area'. Currently the German (MILo), French (Ofpra/Flora) and Norwegian (Landinfo) databases are connected to the Portal, whereas the Swedish and Finnish databases will soon be connected to the system.

On 7 and 8 February the first National COI Portal Administrators (or NCPA) meeting took place in Malta. 32 representatives from EU Member States and associated countries attended the meeting.

A National COI Portal Administrator (or NCPA) is the designated person responsible for running the national access of Member States to the central COI Portal, including the connections of national COI databases to the Portal and/or management of the Portal's national upload area.



The aim of this meeting was to update NCPAs on the state of play of the Common COI Portal, to clarify the role of NCPAs and to identify common household rules for the management of the Upload Area.

With the support of the Working Party on the Portal, EASO described the history of the Portal: from the Portal's conception and construction phase at the Commission, to its development, hand-over to EASO, and current state of play. Taking into account the European COI context and the EASO COI Network strategy, which was presented to the Management Board on 4-5 February, EASO outlined the next steps and future prospects for the Portal.



In view of the need to increase the use of the Portal and to collect users' feedback, consolidation and promotion of the Portal will remain the main objectives in the next phase. However, minor developments, such as the implementation of a new and more relevant thesaurus, will also be essential for upgrading the system.

After providing a general overview of the Portal, the plenary presentations moved to the core of the system: from its architecture to its main components and functionalities.

Based on this common background, the NCPAs attended break-out sessions to discuss a number of topics: NCPA responsibilities, Household rules and quality control, and finally training needs and tools. The exchanges proved to be fruitful and constructive, leading to a general consensus on the need to maintain a clean and consistent upload area in order to facilitate search and retrieval of COI.

EASO will organise a training session for all NCPAs on 11 April 2013. This session will also be an occasion for participants to test the NCPA guidelines which will be drafted in time.

As more and more information converges on the Portal - either through database connection or uploading - and as NCPAs gain more and more experience with the management of the upload area, the Portal will provide users with a great opportunity to share knowledge and facilitate communication on COI. In doing so, the Common Portal will become an important tool in the further implementation of the Common European Asylum System.

EASO meets members of EU Member States Courts and Tribunals



EASO's meeting with members from EU Member States courts and tribunals, 17 and 18 December 2012, Malta

On 17 and 18 December 2012, EASO met with a wide and experienced representation from Member States' courts and tribunals dealing with asylum matters.

This event was organized in close cooperation with the International Association of Refugee Law Judges (IARLJ) and aimed at facilitating a discussion on the development of EASO's support to Member States courts and tribunals.

Following a reflection on the principle of judicial independence, participants exchanged their views on the role that second instance decision makers can play in the implementation of the Common European Asylum System.

At the meeting, participants provided an overview of relevant institutions and bodies with responsibilities in this field and exchanged views on the scope of judicial review in different Member States, which ranges from a full hearing of evidence and assessment in some Member States to a marginal judicial review in others. Discussions were also held on the possible synergies that could be promoted between the work that is being carried out by relevant actors such as the IARLJ or UNHCR.

Building on the interest raised by participants, EASO will strengthen its support in 2013 with a strategy that includes the development of a pilot database of EU jurisprudence as well as professional development initiatives available to newly appointed and experienced refugee law judges.

EASO is inspired by the interest and support demonstrated by such a wide and active participation in this event, and looks forward to continuing its fruitful cooperation with the judiciary in 2013.

EASO in Pictures



10th EASO Management Board Meeting, 4/5 February 2013



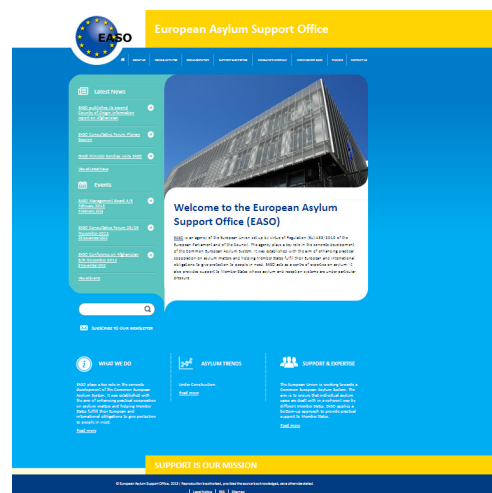
On 8 January 2013, Finland's State Secretary Ms. Marjo Anttoora, visited EASO and held a meeting with EASO's Executive Director to discuss EASO's role in the Common European Asylum System



JHA Informal Council Family Photo: on 16/17 January 2013, the informal JHA Council was held in Dublin. Dr Visser participated in the Council meeting. Picture: Irish Presidency (www.eu2013.ie)



New state of the art EASO conference facilities situated in the EASO headquarters at the Valletta harbour (Malta).



EASO has the pleasure to announce the launch of its redesigned website (see notice on page 8)

EASO launches its redesigned website

EASO has the pleasure to announce the launch of its redesigned website, <http://www.easo.europa.eu/>, which provides new innovative tools and a highly advanced interface, as well as a larger range of possibilities to publish documents and other material. The website provides a one stop shop for information related to EASO. It contains up-to-date information on EASO, its tasks and activities, recent news, events, EASO support, training, the consultative forum, vacancies, procurement, EASO publications, and other useful information and documentation. The redesign aims at improving end-user experience by enhancing navigation and usability. **Learn more about EASO, please visit: www.easo.europa.eu**

EASO Vacancies

EASO has recently published the following vacancies:

Reference Number	Title	Closing date
EASO/2013/CA/001	Human Resources Assistant (FG III)	5th March 2013
EASO/2013/CA/002	Human Resources Assistant (FG IV)	5th March 2013

For more information please visit www.easo.europa.eu and select 'working for EASO'.

EASO newsletter

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