



European Asylum Support Office

Newsletter — July/August 2013

EDITORIAL

In July 2013, EASO welcomed Croatia to its structures. In this context an EASO delegation visited Zagreb on an official visit.

One of the focuses of this month's edition is the EASO annual report on the situation of asylum in the EU in 2012 (see page 2). EASO has now issued an open call for civil society to provide input on its annual report on the situation of Asylum in the EU (see page 6). Also in July, EASO organized a workshop on Russia, in view of the recent increased numbers of applications for international protection from citizens of the Russian Federation. The workshop analysed the possible reasons behind these increased numbers (see page 5)

As to EASO training, in this edition we look into the new (updated) *Interview Techniques* module. We also update our readers on the development of the new module on the Common European Asylum System, which will be finalised by September 2013.

Jean-Pierre Schembri
Newsletter Editor
EASO Spokesperson

IN THE NEWS: EASO's Annual Report on the situation of asylum in the EU 2012

On 8 July, EASO published its second Annual Report on the Situation of Asylum in the European Union 2012. Amongst other things the report highlights:

- 335,365 asylum applications in the EU;
- Applicants from Afghanistan continued to be the most numerous overall in the EU (28,005);
- Overall EU protection rate rises to 28 %;
- Highest recognition rates were noted for citizens of Syria, Eritrea, Mali and Somalia;
- Greece, Luxembourg, Sweden and Italy formally requested support from EASO in 2012.

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EASO welcomes Croatia



Dr Visser, Assistant Minister Krajčak, Deputy Prime Minister Ostojić, Mag. Wolfgang Taucher

During the first month of Croatia's accession to the European Union, EASO was invited to visit Zagreb by the Croatian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior, Mr Ranko Ostojić. On 30 July 2013, the Executive Director of EASO, Dr. Robert K Visser, and the Chair of the Management Board, Mag. Wolfgang Taucher, held meetings with Mr Ostojić, his Assistant Minister, Ms Ines Krajčak, and high ranking officials responsible for asylum matters in Croatia. EASO welcomed the accession of Croatia to the EU, which implies its participation in EASO's activities as a full member of the Management Board. The discussions focused on the situation of asylum in Croatia and the cooperation possibilities within EASO. EASO training to Croatian officials, Country of Origin Information activities, provision of data and analysis in the framework of the Early warning and Preparedness System and cooperation with countries of the Western Balkans region were identified as priority areas for strengthening cooperation. EASO highlighted the importance of the adoption of the EU asylum package and offered its support to Croatia in the implementation of the CEAS. During their stay in Zagreb, the EASO delegation had also the opportunity to visit the reception facilities for asylum seekers of Kutina and of the Porin Hotel.

EASO's Annual Report on the situation of asylum in the EU 2012

On 8 July, EASO released its Annual Report on the Situation of Asylum in the European Union 2012. The Report aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the situation of asylum in the EU, by looking at flows of applicants for international protection to the EU, analysing application and decision data, and focusing on some of the most important countries of origin of applicants for international protection in 2012. In particular, the report focuses on three asylum flows that underline the very different characteristics of asylum applicants in the EU: Afghanistan, Syria and Western Balkans countries.

In 2012 there were 335,365 asylum applications in the EU. Of these, 260 575 were 'new' applicants for international protection (a 1 % increase compared to 256 945 in 2011)¹. Applicants from **Afghanistan** continued to be the most numerous overall in the EU (28,005) and included large numbers of unaccompanied minors. In 2012 EASO produced two expert reports on Afghanistan.

Syria showed the largest increase in applications (206% compared to 2011). This was due to the deteriorating security situation in Syria over the course of the year. In this context, EASO organized a network of experts with the EU Member States, to pool expertise and to be prepared for an eventual influx. In 2012, there were over 95% of applications from Syrian citizens being accepted by EU Member States.

The report underlines, however, that when summed together, applicants from the six **Western Balkans countries**², continued to represent the highest number of applications made in the EU for asylum (more than Afghanistan and Syria combined), despite the fact that Member States judged such applications to well-founded in only 4% of cases overall. EASO will publish a comprehensive report on the Western Balkans in the second half of this year.

Some 9 % more decisions in first instance were taken than in the previous year (260,425), and the overall protection rate at first instance rose to 28 % (71,700 positive decisions granting international or national protection status). The highest

recognition rates were noted for citizens of Syria, Eritrea, Mali and Somalia.

The report also highlights major developments with regard to EU/national policy, legislative changes and jurisprudence (the *acquis* and their interpretation) and provides insight into the practical functioning of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) by observing developments relating to the different stages of the asylum procedure (from access to procedure to return). In this context, asylum reception and detention conditions and policy in Member States continued to be a challenging area.

In 2012, Member States experienced large variations in asylum flows to their country (when compared to the previous year): Nine Member States faced variations of greater than 45% (plus or minus) compared to the previous year in 2012. Such large variations make long-term planning difficult. Nevertheless, many Member States, made improvements to their asylum systems, instituting quality control systems, improved IT case management tools and better use of Country of Origin Information (COI) in decision-making.

In some cases, EASO received direct requests for assistance on various aspects of Member States' asylum systems: Four Member States (Greece, Luxembourg, Sweden and Italy) formally requested support from the Agency in 2012 in areas including training, COI and statistics.

The EASO Annual Report also serves as a useful tool for national and EU policy-makers helping to identify areas where improvement is most needed (and thus where EASO and other key stakeholders should focus their future efforts), in line with its declared purpose of improving the quality, consistency and effectiveness of the CEAS.

Click [here](http://easo.europa.eu/wp-content/uploads/EASO-Annual-Report-Final.pdf) to view the report: <http://easo.europa.eu/wp-content/uploads/EASO-Annual-Report-Final.pdf>

¹ These figures do not include AT, HU, IT and PT. A new applicant is one who has never previously made an application for international protection in the country of destination.

² Kosovo, FYROM, Albania, Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia Herzegovina

EASO Training

Overview of EASO training activities

In the first semester 2013 EASO has delivered numerous training activities – organising train-the-trainer sessions, updating existing modules, continued working on the new module on Interview Techniques and CEAS, started the development of a new module for Managers, organised the EASO Training National Contact Point meeting and supporting EASO emergency and special support operations.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all experts who supported EASO in its training activities, thus contributing to a successful training semester.

With the second semester just around the corner, EASO is now busy with deployment requests to Member States for the activities to be carried out between September and December 2013.

The first two activities for the second semester will be the train-the-trainer sessions for **Interviewing Vulnerable Persons** and **Evidence Assessment** (both in updated version).

The online part for both modules will start on **9 September**, while the face-to-face session will be held in Malta on 8-11 October. You can register for both training sessions at training@easo.europa.eu. The registration deadline is **20 August 2013**.

Update on the EASO Training Curriculum – the Interview Techniques Module

The new Interview Techniques module covers theoretical aspects and relevant legislation from a very practical perspective; promotes the use of a structured interview method and provides participants with good practical examples, including some tips to tackle difficult interview situations and tools to enhance the quality of asylum interviews. This module provides the basis needed to conduct professional interviews with applicants for international protection in a respectful, thorough and efficient manner. During last spring, a pilot version of the module was tested with two groups of trainees, whose suggestions and views have been incorporated in the last phase of the development.

EASO is also working to update the two specialised modules on Interviewing Children and Interviewing Vulnerable Persons, which will be fully aligned with the content of the core module on Interviewing Techniques. The latter will provide complementary skills to officials who are working with minors and vulnerable groups and have already followed EASO's module on Interviewing Techniques.

EASO will also present the updated versions of all three interviewing modules in the context of its annual Didactic Seminar in October 2013. We encourage potential participants to register for the **upcoming train-the-trainer session on the Interview Techniques module** starting its on-line part **7 October** with the face to face session in Malta, 5-8 November. You can register for this training session at training@easo.europa.eu. The registration deadline is **24 September 2013**.

Common European Asylum System Module development

EASO is currently working on developing a new module on the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). A number of meetings have been organised in Malta during this year and together with the content experts, EASO will be finalising this module by September 2013.

The CEAS module will be a short module compared to the other modules as it serves the purpose of an introductory module to the other modules within EASO Training Curriculum.

The module will provide participants with an overview of the CEAS from a legal as well as a practical point of view, with a clear focus on its most recent developments. The module starts by giving a brief historical overview of the specific institutional framework in which the CEAS developed. The second chapter will focus on the main legal instruments namely, the Geneva Convention and other Human Rights instruments and the EU asylum law. The notion of practical cooperation between national asylum administrations, with a special focus on the role of EASO is explored in the third chapter. The relations of the EU with third countries in the field of asylum are developed in the fourth chapter whereas the final chapter provides the possibility of discussing the future of the CEAS.

The first training session (on-line part) will start on **18 November 2013** and the face-to-face sessions will be delivered in Malta on 18-20 December 2013. Whilst this module mainly targets asylum officials, other experts working in the field of international protection may also find this module useful in their-day-to day work. In order to be able to accommodate more participants to this new module, EASO is willing to organise a parallel training session during the same days. Interested participants are kindly requested to register by **4 November 2013** on training@easo.europa.eu.

MEP Metsola visits EASO



On 5 July, Dr Roberta Metsola, Member of the European Parliament, visited EASO and held a meeting with Dr Robert K. Visser, EASO's Executive Director.

During the meeting the two discussed the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and in particular the new legislative instruments which were adopted by the European Parliament in June 2013. Moreover, the two discussed the results of the fact finding report on intra EU relocation from Malta (EUREMA).

The report was issued by EASO in 2012 and will be used in the evaluation which the European Commission will conduct once EUREMA II comes to an end.

Building a stronger relationship between EASO and the European Parliament was also one of the discussed subjects, and the importance of the contributions made by the European Parliament's Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, (LIBE) to which Dr Metsola is a member, was stressed.

EASO Practical Cooperation Workshop on the Russian Federation

On 17-18 July 2013, EASO held a Practical Cooperation Workshop on the recent increased numbers of applications for international protection from citizens of the Russian Federation. This is its third Practical Cooperation Workshop this year (after previous workshops on Syria and the Western Balkans in spring).

When looking at EU-level data, analysis showed that the Russian Federation had become one of the top countries of origin of applicants for international protection (in second place for total applicants for 2012 behind Afghanistan). In recent months, moreover, there had been a steep increase of applicants from the Russian Federation, especially in Poland and Germany. This recent influx consists mainly of North Caucasian (primarily Chechen) families.

During the workshop participants from 14 Member States, the European Commission, Frontex and UNHCR analysed pull and push factors to clarify this recent trend. Preliminary findings seem to indicate that the sudden surge in numbers is rather a result of specific pull factors in Member States than of changes in the situation in the country of origin.

Information on the financial benefits and asylum procedures in Member States are widely available on the internet. Other pull factors that generally apply in several EU MS are the existence of a large diaspora, geographical proximity and the relative ease to access the EU.

Although the security and human rights situation in the Northern Caucasus has not deteriorated to such an extent that it can explain a mass exodus, and the majority of applicants seem to have left in search of a better future, some human rights concerns continue to exist, as demonstrated by the 22% acceptance rate of claims for asylum by Russian citizens overall in 2012.



During presentations, experts at the meeting raised concerns on the human rights situation in the Russian Federation, especially for particular groups, such as political opponents, NGOs and human rights activists, artists and intellectuals, sexual minorities and non-traditional religious organisations.

Breakouts during the workshop allowed Member States to discuss specific challenges relating to country of origin information and refugee status determination (RSD) for the Russian caseload, such as the availability of protection, internal flight alternatives, origin verification and the availability of reliable sources of information.

Best practices were also discussed with regard to measures taken to facilitate the processing of applications within short timeframes, and experiences exchanged relating to the return of rejected applicants.

As a follow-up to the workshop, EASO is considering setting up a specific network to discuss COI and RSD issues in more depth. Also the added value of an analytical study into the mechanisms behind the recent influx from the Russian Federation is being examined.

EASO Vacancies

EASO has recently published the following vacancies:

Seconded National Experts (only for EU Member States Government Officials)		
Reference Number	Title	Closing date
EASO/2013/SNE/004	Reception Officer	7 August 2013

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

Open Consultations

EASO has recently issued an open call for civil society to provide input on its annual report on the situation of Asylum in the EU. More information can be found on <http://easo.europa.eu/easo-consultative-forum/open-consultation/>

Feedback and suggestions need to be sent to Consultative-Forum@easo.europa.eu by **30 August 2013**.

Civil society organisations, who have not yet registered to the EASO Consultative Forum, may apply here: <http://easo.europa.eu/easo-consultative-forum/easo-consultative-forum-register-ecfr/>

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EASO Consultation Calendar

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