



European Asylum Support Office

Newsletter — October 2013

EDITORIAL

This month has been characterised by the sad tragedies at sea near Lampedusa, where hundreds of migrants were confirmed to have drowned. We would like to first of all express our sincere condolences to the families of the victims. A task-force has been convened with the Commission to identify the tools which the EU has at its disposal and which could be used in a more effective way. EASO forms part of the task-force (see page 3 for more information).

In this edition, among other things, we also look at EASO's support to Bulgaria, EASO's visit to the Emergency Transit Centre, the consultative forum which will be held next month, and the latest asylum trends.

Jean-Pierre Schembri
Newsletter Editor
EASO Spokesperson

EASO to provide support to Bulgaria



On 17 October, EASO and Bulgaria signed an Operating Plan which provides for EASO support to Bulgaria, until September 2014, in a number of prioritized 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). See page 2.

CONTENTS

- Editorial and in the news - page 1
- EASO to provide support to Bulgaria - page 2
- JHA Council discusses Lampedusa and Syria - page 3
- Updated EASO COI portal launched - page 3
- The Salzburg Forum - page 4
- Visit to the Emergency Transit Centre - page 5
- The EASO Consultative Forum – page 5
- EASO training - page 6
- The Quality Matrix - page 7
- EASO National Contacts Points Training Meeting - page 8
- Latest asylum trends - page 9
- New EASO Staff Committee - page 10
- European Council discusses migration flows - page 10
- EASO notices, **including vacancies** - page 11

European Parliament delegation visits EASO



A delegation from the European Parliament's Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee visited the EASO Headquarters in Malta, on 29/30 October 2013. The delegation is made up of members of the European Parliament, namely MEP Jan Mulder (NL), MEP Josef Weidenholzer (AT), and MEP Roberta Metsola (MT). The delegation met with EASO's Executive Director, Dr Robert K Visser, who presented EASO's role within the Common European Asylum System, in view of the recent adoption of the new asylum package. The EASO Executive Director also gave an update on the progress made with regard to the Early warning and Preparedness System (EPS). EASO is currently developing an EPS aimed at detecting situations likely to give rise to particular asylum pressures by providing asylum trend analysis and risk scenarios. During their visit, MEPs were introduced to EASO's training and quality tools, various EASO Country of Origin (COI) products (such as COI reports, factsheets, networks etc) and the EASO COI portal. In addition, MEPs were updated on EASO's operational activities on the ground to assist Member States subject to specific and/or emergency situations. Particular emphasis was made on ongoing EASO support projects in Bulgaria, Greece and Italy. Cooperation between various stakeholders, in particular, the strengthening of future cooperation between the EP and EASO was also discussed. UNHCR, IOM and civil society were part of the programme.

EASO to provide support to Bulgaria

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 render immediate support to Bulgaria via a joint expertise of EASO and Member States.

Dr Robert K. Visser, Executive Director of EASO, and Minister Yovchev, Bulgarian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for the Interior, have signed, the EASO Operating Plan for Bulgaria. The Operating Plan provides for support and deployment of EASO Asylum Support teams and the provision of technical and operational assistance to Bulgaria up until the end of September 2014.

The plan aims at helping Bulgaria cope with the increase in the influx while at the same time improving and strengthening the Bulgarian asylum and reception system, in the context of the implementation of the instruments of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS).

EASO measures to support Bulgaria fall under three themes, namely: operational support; institutional support; and horizontal support. Joint Asylum Support Teams made up of EASO experts, experts from Member States and Bulgarian Officials will be set-up. Their work

will include: performing registration of asylum seekers; informing applicants about the procedures; and supporting referral of vulnerable cases and further identification to the appropriate national asylum procedure. EASO will also provide training for Bulgarian civil servants, capacity building in Country of Origin Information, organise thematic workshops and provide technical advice and quality standards. This includes planning a strategy to increase the capacity of reception facilities and to make better use of existing reception capacities.

Following the signature of the Operational Plan, Dr Visser gave the following comment *'I am glad that we have agreed, in a very short time, on a holistic plan which will provide for much needed support to Bulgaria, which is currently facing significant pressure on its asylum and reception system. We have assessed the needs of Bulgaria and adopted a flexible approach in providing tailor-made support to Bulgaria. We will now immediately start work on the ground to ensure the effective implementation of the plan. In just over 2 years since EASO has become fully operational, this is the 5th Member State to which we will be providing this type of operational support.'*

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.

JHA Council discusses Lampedusa and Syria

On 7 and 8 October 2013, a meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Council was held in Luxembourg. The EASO Executive Director, Dr Robert Visser, attended the Home Affairs session on 8 October 2013. During the meeting, Ministers discussed, amongst other things, the tragedy at sea near **Lampedusa** where hundreds of migrants were confirmed to have drowned. The Council expressed its sincere condolences to the families of the victims. Ministers held an exchange of views on the actions that are needed to avoid such tragedies. The Council agreed to convene a task-force with the Commission at short notice to identify the tools which the EU has at its disposal and which could be used in a more effective way. **EASO will form part of the task-force.**

Moreover, the Council held an in-depth discussion on Syria with particular reference to the protection of refugees. The High Representative and representatives of the Commission, EASO and FRONTEX updated Ministers on the latest developments. Given the deterioration of the situation in Syria, the Council recalled the strong EU commitment to step up assistance to the concerned populations in Syria and the neighbouring countries. The Council welcomed the progress being made towards the establishment of a Regional Protection Programme and invited the Commission to continue its important work. The Council also took note of the report on the results of the fact-finding mission, organised by the Commission in cooperation with EASO and FRONTEX, which visited Bulgaria, Cyprus and Greece, with the objective of monitoring the situation in these member states in terms of current and potential migratory pressures coming, in particular, from Syria.

The Council also took note of the information provided by the Commission on the results of the First Annual Relocation Forum, which took place in Brussels on 25 September 2013.

Updated EASO COI portal launched

On October 4, a new version of the COI Portal was released. The COI Portal now features EASO visual identity and logo as well as some refreshments to its main descriptive texts. At the same time, the Swedish (Lifos) and Finnish (Tellus) national COI databases will soon be linked to the COI Portal, bringing the total of connected databases to 5 (DE, FR, NO, SE, FI).

Furthermore, some countries have already started to store COI documents on their respective national upload areas, thus contributing to the number of documents available from the Portal. Currently, 530 users from the National asylum administrations are registered to the COI Portal. Recently, the newly created Greek asylum office registered more than 100 users who will be able to search and retrieve documents in the Greek alphabet once such documents are made available. During the COI specialist networks meetings on Syria, Pakistan and Somalia, participants had an opportunity to explore the newly created dedicated COI Portal folders which they will use for the storage of information on these countries of origin (list of selected sources, meeting reports, selected COI reports, etc). These folders, available from the EASO 'Upload Area', are accessible to all users of the COI Portal.

On 19 November 2013, the National Common Portal Administrators (NCPAs) will be meeting in Malta. This event will be an occasion to reflect on their role in regard to the COI Portal and to stimulate usage and activities on the platform.

Finally, an Advisory Group composed of representatives from EU+ countries whose national databases are connected, or in the process of connecting, to the Portal, and representatives from EU+ countries using the Upload Area - was set up. The role of such a group (made up of 11 participants and the European Commission) will be to share experiences on the practical use of the Portal and discuss general directions in relation to its development so as to ensure full functionality and eventual improvement.

The Ministerial Conference of the Salzburg Forum (16-17 October 2013)

The EASO Executive Director, Dr. Robert K. Visser, participated in the Ministerial Conference of the Salzburg Forum held in Bucharest on 16-17 October 2013 upon invitation of the Romanian Minister of the Interior, Mr Radu Stroe.

The Salzburg Forum is an informal network for multilateral dialogue and regional cooperation in the field of internal security, migration and asylum. It gathers the Ministers of the Interior from Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Croatia.

On this occasion, Ministers of the Interior of the Friends of the Salzburg Forum from the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, FYROM, Montenegro and Serbia) and Moldova were also invited to attend the Conference. In addition, representatives from the European Commission, EASO, Europol, Frontex and ICMPD participated in the meeting.

The Ministers exchanged their views on the priorities for the new EU multiannual programme in the field of Justice and Home Affairs. In the field of migration and asylum, the coherent implementation of the legal framework of the Common European Asylum System, as well as new initiatives for advanced practical cooperation on asylum, deserved special attention. The Ministers underlined the key role of EASO in this field.

Discussions also focussed on approaches for a more effective management of irregular migration in the period 2014-2020. The Ministers highlighted the importance of regional cooperation and the need to reinforce the capacity to manage migration flows, to grant protection to persons in need and to enhance cooperation with third countries of transit and origin. The role of the EU Agencies, particularly Frontex and EASO, was deemed crucial.

The EASO Executive Director informed on the current situation of asylum in the EU, with particular focus on Syria and the Western Balkans.



Family photo of heads of delegation to the meeting

Moreover, the EASO Executive Director reflected on some ideas for effective management on asylum: “Firstly, the common EU legal framework of the CEAS needs to be fully implemented in a coherent way; secondly, common practices should be promoted through common training, common Country of Origin Information and advanced practical cooperation; thirdly, early warning, preparedness and contingency planning should be enhanced; fourthly, fair and efficient asylum procedures should be further developed. In all these processes, EASO stands ready to support the Member States and EU Institutions and bodies”.

Visit to the Emergency Transit Centre in Timisoara (Romania)



Mr Filimon Pitea, Director of the ETC (left) Dr Robert K Visser, and Dr Nelu Pop (right)

An EASO delegation headed by its Executive Director, Dr. Robert K. Visser, visited the Emergency Transit Centre (ETC) located in Timisoara (Romania) on 16 October 2013.

The ETC provides temporary reception to refugees who are in need of urgent evacuation from their country of origin or residence due to imminent risk to their life or integrity. The centre hosts during a period of six months up to 200 persons who will be then resettled to other host countries in the European Union and beyond. Since 2008, the ETC has received around 1.400 persons and hosts, at the moment, persons from Sudan, Syria, Iraq, Eritrea and Somalia among other nationalities.

Besides providing a safe place to persons in urgent need of protection, the ETC facilitates the resettlement procedure to other countries and prepares the refugees for their future life in those countries by providing, inter alia, language courses and pre-departure cultural orientation. The Romanian authorities cooperate with UNHCR, IOM and local NGO in the implementation of the activities under this initiative.

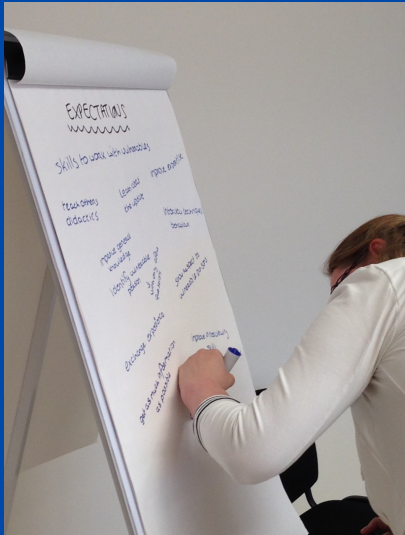
In his visit the EASO Executive Director stated: "We welcome the excellent work done by the Romanian authorities regarding the ETC. This initiative has become a best practice of advanced practical cooperation across the European Union, which contributes to the development of a Common European Asylum System".

3rd EASO Consultative Forum Plenary Session

The third EASO Consultative Forum plenary meeting will take place on 27 & 28 November in Valletta, Malta. The annual plenary meeting of the Consultative Forum is an event that brings together all registered members of the EASO Consultative Forum to look at the experience of the past year of working together, identify lessons learned and earmark areas of future cooperation. In 2013 alone, more than 30 organisations have been involved in EASO's work either through e-consultation or participation in EASO expert meetings. For EASO, consultation is not just an annual meeting but a continuous two way expert dialogue bringing together experts in the field to ensure that EASO's products address issues comprehensively taking into account all possible expertise available. In this year's meeting, participants will have the opportunity to engage in expert discussions during thematic workshops on seven specific areas of EASO's work. These are: EASO and the Early warning, Preparedness and Crisis Management Mechanism of Article 33 of the Dublin Regulation, EASO's work in Greece, EASO's quality processes, an EASO case study about the Western Balkans, EASO's role on the external dimension of the CEAS, Common COI products produced by EASO, and EASO's role in emergency situations. Areas of possible cooperation between EASO and civil society will be identified and discussed. The programme also includes a panel discussion on the implementation of the CEAS. In order to familiarise Consultative Forum member with EASO and its staff, maximise, this year's programme includes also a visit to the EASO Headquarters and a series of presentations by EASO staff on the different areas of EASO work. Registration is now open. More information about the meeting and registration forms can be found on the following page: <http://easo.europa.eu/easo-consultative-forum/registration/>. Discussion papers on each point will be drafted by EASO and shared with participants ahead of the meeting. You can also contact us on 0035622487599/531 or email: consultative_forum@easo.europa.eu. We look forward to meeting you on 27 & 28 November in Valletta, Malta.

EASO Training

Overview of EASO training activities



Picture: Trainer Ria Groen, the Netherlands, writing down participants' expectations in the EASO Train-the-Trainer session in the module Interviewing Vulnerable Persons, delivered together with Joanna Matthews, the United Kingdom.

The online training of the **Exclusion** and **Interview Techniques** module has started in October and will be followed by the face-to-face session due to be held on 5-8 November in Malta. The online part of the last two train-the-trainer sessions of this year – **End of Protection** and the **Common European Asylum System (CEAS)** will start on 4 November and the face-to-face session will take place on 4-6 December in Malta.

The registration deadline for the last two train-the-trainer sessions was extended until 30th October.

The training Plan for next year will be published by EASO next month.

EASO Didactic Seminar



On 22 and 23 October EASO organized the Annual Didactic Seminar. During the Seminar, trainers were informed about the changes made to four EASO training modules which have been recently updated – *Inclusion*, *Interview Techniques*, *Interviewing Children* and *Interviewing Vulnerable Persons*. Two separate workshops were held to focus on the Inclusion module and the interviewing techniques training package. A plenary session delivered by Fadela Novak, an expert from UNHCR, was organised for all participants with a special focus on gender-related issues in the asylum area. Moreover, Gabor Gyulai from Hungarian Helsinki Committee delivered a presentation on the Credo “Credibility Assessment in Asylum Procedures” training manual. Fadela Novak complemented the presentation with an informative session regarding the CREDO II Project, which focuses on credibility assessment in the case of children. The Annual Didactic Seminar was attended by 35 participants from eleven different Member States, and a representative from UNHCR and FRONTEX.

The Quality Matrix

On 24-25 September, EASO organised its fourth Thematic Meeting in the Quality Matrix process. The meeting, under the topic of 'Quality and Eligibility', focused on Grounds for Granting International Protection. Representatives of Member States, EASO and UNHCR came together to discuss the interpretation of notions such as persecution and the different grounds under the definition of a refugee; the grounds for granting subsidiary protection under Article 15 of the Qualification Directive, with particular emphasis on the provision of Article 15(c); as well as the concepts of actors of protection and internal protection alternative.

Building up on the initial findings regarding Member States' practices, participants exchanged expertise and information on quality tools and mechanisms in this core aspect of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). Case-studies highlighted the importance, as well as the complexity, of the concepts applied by decision-makers on a daily basis. During the meeting, participants had an opportunity to discuss examples of good practice, such as the guidelines on the assessment of membership of a particular social group (with a focus on female genital mutilation), presented by the Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (Belgium).

Through a panel discussion, they learned about the interpretation and application of Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Germany) and the Office of the Refugee Commissioner (Malta). In terms of quality tools and mechanisms relevant to Eligibility, EASO presented one of its key tools to support Member States in achieving common quality in the CEAS: the EASO Training Curriculum module on Inclusion.



Such meetings give Member States the opportunity to discuss the fundamentals of the CEAS and to bring their practices a step closer to a harmonised approach in accordance with applicable legal standards, and the standards of fairness and efficiency.

The next Quality Matrix Thematic Meeting, on the topic of Exclusion, will be held in Malta on 11-12 November 2013. After covering the topics of the Personal Interview, Evidence Assessment, Eligibility and Exclusion, EASO will have completed the mapping of four core areas of the CEAS within 2013. In December 2013, EASO will hold a Meeting of the National Contact Points on Quality, which will allow for timely evaluation of the Quality Matrix methodology and achievements and for planning EASO's future activities in this key area. The topics tentatively identified for 2014 are of procedural nature and tackle issues relevant to access to procedure, the Dublin Regulation, as well as border procedures and accelerated procedures.

The Quality Matrix activities will continue in 2014-2015 with a strengthened focus on development of practical tools on the basis of comprehensive information, identified good practices and valuable expertise from Member States.

EASO Training National Contact Points Meeting

On 24 and 25 October EASO held its Training National Contact Point meeting. Representatives of 24 Member States and representatives of UNHCR and FRONTEX participated in this meeting. The main aim of this meeting was to provide Member States with a comprehensive update on recent developments in EASO Training – including EASO Training plans for 2014. This meeting also allowed Member States to share good practices with regard to the implementation of EASO's Training Curriculum on national level. Three Member States, The Netherlands, Greece and Austria held presentations on best practices in their countries. Moreover, Ms Anna Downing presented the practice of UK in view of the training developments in the area of gender.

EASO has also introduced and facilitated a discussion on a new proposal on its learning path for the EASO Training Curriculum. Through the experience gained by managing the Curriculum, EASO suggested a new concept of a circular learning path to better reflect the particular needs of different audiences to EASO training. In this respect, EASO has identified five primary training target groups to its Training Curriculum: Case officers, Managers of asylum units, Legal Officers, COI Researchers and Reception Officers. A set of Core, Advanced and Optional Modules were designed for each target group to ensure that trainees receive the training in the areas which are key for the performance of their specific roles. The Core Modules suggested for each target group will ensure that EU officers who are performing the same tasks will receive the same core basic training, creating a common level playing field for asylum officials irrespective of the national training culture. Moreover

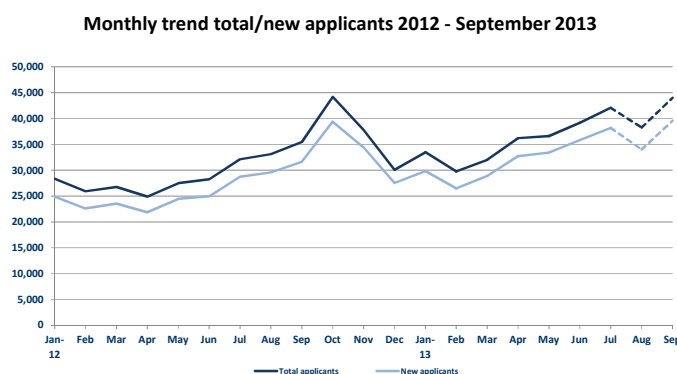
modules within the Advanced and Optional group will help the user to increase the level of specialisation both vertically and horizontally. In the group of advanced and optional modules the system of “pick and choose” will provide the necessary flexibility to adapt to the needs from the day to day work of an individual asylum officer.

EASO also provided an update on the EASO Training and Expert Pool, which now gathers 147 individual experts from 21 EU countries. New processes and routines were introduced in order to further enhance the operability of the Pool and to further support the development of the EASO expert training base. Moreover the draft of a Code of Practice for the Members of the EASO Training and Expert Pool was discussed. The aim of the Code of Practice is to promote professional values whilst establishing behavioral standards that should guide experts during the course of their work for EASO. Once agreed, the Code of Practice shall be applicable to all members of the EASO Training and expert Pool.

The outcome of this NCP meeting together with the overview of EASO training plans for 2014 will be presented at the upcoming EASO Management Board meeting 29 November 2013.

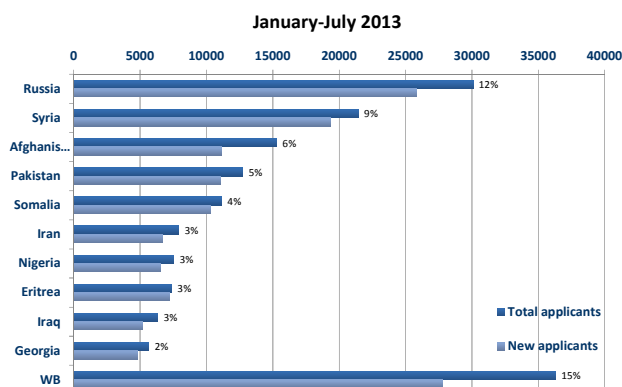
Latest Asylum Trends

1. Number of applicants for international protection in the EU+



The overall total applications in September were 24% higher than the same month in 2012 and approximately equal to numbers seen in October 2012, which were the greatest seen for any month since EU-level data collection began in 2008.

2. Top Countries of Origin (% of total claims) in EU+ countries



For total applications (to July 2013), Western Balkans citizens continued to make the largest proportion of claims in the EU+.

3. Latest Country of origin trends

Syria

- In September 2013, applications continued to be made in a significant number of EU+ states, leaving Syria in the Top 3 countries of origin for 18 Member States and Associated countries;
- There was a sharp increase in asylum claims by Syrians in Bulgaria in August and September 2013.

Russia

- After a very steep rise in applicants holding Russian passports (mainly Chechens and mainly to Germany and Poland) from March to May 2013, an equally steep decline has now taken place.

Eritrea

- After having risen very steeply in July and August, applications from Eritreans declined in September 2013

Western Balkans

- Applications from Western Balkans (WB) countries saw a sharp increase in September (35%) compared to the previous month and absolute numbers of applicants remain higher than in previous years;
- Germany received the vast majority of claims for asylum in EU + countries made by WB citizens in the month of September.

More information can be found from the EASO Asylum Quarterly Report: <http://easo.europa.eu/asylum-trends-analysis/quarterly-report/>

New EASO Staff Committee Appointed



Picture above: Dr Robert K. Visser, EASO Executive Director with five of the members of the Staff Committee and the members of the Electoral Committee.

The new EASO Staff Committee has been elected! The elections were held on 24 September 2013 (with an early voting session held on 20 September 2013).

The EASO staff committee members are elected by EASO staff members. It is worth mentioning that during this election there was a 95% voter's turnout! The Staff Committee is composed of both genders and represents all categories and groups of EASO staff (ADs ASTs and CAs). The Staff Committee will contribute to the smooth running of EASO by providing for staff representation in various fora. The Executive Director welcomed the newly elected members and expressed his wish to work hand in hand with them in the future. The members of the staff committee are the following:

Staff Committee (Full members): Wibke Braun, Mihai Maiug and Anca Pristavu

Staff Committee (Alternate members): Jadwiga Maczynska, Etela Miklosova and Barbara Opalska

We wish them the best of luck!

European Council Meeting discusses migration flows

The European Council of 24/25 October 2013 discussed, amongst other things, Migration flows. While expressing sadness at the recent deaths in the Mediterranean, the European Council underlined the importance of addressing root causes of migration flows by enhancing cooperation with the countries of origin and transit, including through appropriate EU development support and an effective return policy. It also called for closer cooperation with the relevant international organisations, in particular UNHCR and the International Organisation of Migration in the third countries concerned. Not only in the territory of the EU Member States but also in the countries of origin and transit, the fight against trafficking and smuggling of human beings should be stepped up. Furthermore, the European Council called for the reinforcement of Frontex activities in the Mediterranean and along the Southeastern borders of the EU. Swift implementation by Member States of the new European Border Surveillance System (EUROSUR) will be crucial to help detecting vessels and illegal entries, contributing to protecting and saving lives at the EU's external borders.

The European Council invited the newly established Task Force for the Mediterranean, led by the European Commission and involving Member States, EU agencies (including EASO) and the EEAS, to identify -based on the principles of prevention, protection and solidarity - priority actions for a more efficient short term use of European policies and tools. The Commission will report to the Council at its meeting of 5-6 December 2013 on the work of the Task Force with a view of taking operational decisions. The Presidency will report to the European Council in December. The European Council will return to asylum and migration issues in a broader and longer term policy perspective in June 2014, when strategic guidelines for further legislative and operational planning in the area of freedom, security and justice will be defined.

EASO Vacancies

EASO has recently published the following vacancies:

Open Calls		
Reference Number	Title	Closing date
EASO/2013/CA/009	Finance and Accounting Assistant	13 November 2013

Seconded National Experts (only for EU Member States Government Officials)		
Reference Number	Title	Closing date
EASO/2013/SNE/006	Asylum Processes Officer	13 November 2013

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

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

About the tragedy in Lampedusa:

The Commission is doing its part, and, for example, was now requested by governments to lead a Task Force with Member States and EU Agencies such as Frontex, EASO and EUROPOL. We must not allow the momentum on such vital issues to be fuelled by tragedies alone.

Speech of President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso at the European Parliament debate on the European Council, 24-25 October 2013

EASO newsletter

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EASO website

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The 3rd EASO Consultative Forum will be held on 27 & 28 November 2013, in Malta. You can no register on <http://easo.europa.eu/easo-consultative-forum/registration/>



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