EASO participates in the Leaders’ Meeting on the Western Balkans Migration Route

On 25 October 2015, EASO participated in the Leaders’ Meeting on the Western Balkans Migration Route held in Brussels. The statement adopted at the Leaders’ Meeting calls upon EASO (together with other stakeholders) to provide support on a number of strategic areas, in particular exchange of information on reception and size and movement of migratory flows and to provide, together with FRONTEX, technical assistance on return.


EASO and the Hotspots

Picture above: EASO team operational in Lesvos. Read more on EASO’s work in the hotspots on pages 6 and 7.

EASO publishes Country of Origin Information report on Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women

EASO published a new Country of Origin Information (COI) report entitled ‘Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of women’. The report provides information on the modus operandi of trafficking and the situation of victims of trafficking returning to Nigeria. In the report, the role of “madams” within the trafficking networks is highlighted, and the debt system described. Other relevant factors discussed in the report are the role of women’s relatives, and the extent in which “juju” (voodoo or witchcraft) may be used in sex trafficking.

In the last two years, the number of Nigerian applicants in the EU+ countries (EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland) more than tripled, rising from 1000 applicants registered per month in August 2013 to about 3700 in August 2015. Of the total number of applicants, the overwhelming majority is aged between 18 and 34 years, of whom about one-third is female.

Read more on page 4.
Latest asylum trends and main countries of origin

1. Number of applicants for international protection in EU+

In September 2015, the numbers of asylum applications recorded by EU+ continued rising for the fifth consecutive month and reached a new record high with about 172,185 applications reported. This represents an increase of 16% compared to the level recorded in August and two and a half times above the level in the same month of last year. The total of applications for the first nine months of 2015 (about 892,000) has already exceeded the total of 2014 (more than 650,000 applications). The latest weekly information received by EASO indicates that by the end of October 2015 the 1 million application mark will be passed. The share of repeated applicants has been decreasing since March to about 3% of the total, the lowest share recorded in the last three years.

In contrast, the number of claimed unaccompanied minors (UAMs) continued to rise in September compared to August and, for the first time since the EPS data collection started, totalled more than 10,000. The share of applicants who claimed to be UAMs at the moment of lodging an application reached 6% of the total number of applicants in the EU+, one percentage point less than in August. Citizens of Afghanistan continued to represent the main group of claimed UAMs (46%), followed by Syrians (21%) and Eritreans (8%).

2. Main countries of origin of applicants in EU+ countries in September 2015

The map below displays the main countries of origin of asylum applicants recorded by EU+ countries in September, with Syria being, for the fifth consecutive month, the number one citizenship recorded. The number of applicants from Iraq more than doubled in September becoming the second ranked country of origin with more than 25,000 applications lodged in September. Applicants from Afghanistan exceeded again 20,000 in September. Compared to the monthly high registered in February, the number of applications from WB nationals has dropped by half to 15,116 applicants in September 2015 but still remains in fourth place overall in the list of top countries of origin.

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1. The EU+ is composed of EU-28 plus Norway and Switzerland. The share of repeated applicants is the proportion of repeated applicants in the total number of applicants for international protection. The share of UAM (unaccompanied minors) represents the proportion of asylum applicants claiming to be below the age of 18 years in the total number of applicants rather than those assessed to be such after an age assessment has been carried out.

2. At the moment of writing this note data was available for 26 of the 30 EU+ countries.
Among the top ten citizenships of applicants in September, applications from Nigerian, Russian and Iranian citizens, as well as persons considered to be stateless increased in September compared to August.

**Syria** – In September 2015, EU+ countries received over 62,000 applications from Syrians, an increase of 26% compared to August and almost three and a half times the level recorded in the same month of last year. Fifteen of the EU+ countries reporting in September had Syria in their national Top 3 countries of origin.

**Iraq** – The rise in the number of Iraqi applicants accelerated in September, totalling more than 25,000 applications in the EU+ which represented the highest monthly level since 2008 and an increase of 115% compared to August. In September, the ranking of main destination countries changed with Finland ranking first, followed by Sweden, Belgium Germany and Austria. In September the flow of Iraqi applicants was mainly made by first time applicants (99%) and a low proportion of claimed unaccompanied minors (3%).

**Afghanistan** – With an increase of 5% compared to August, in September the number of applications from Afghans rose to 21,000 reaching a new monthly high. This increase represented the seventh month of growth and was in line with the rise to that occurred at the same period last year. In the EU+, the main countries of destination for Afghans in September were Hungary, Sweden and Germany. Together, these three EU+ countries comprised 68% of the total number of applications from Afghans recorded in the EU+ in September 2015.

**Western Balkan nationals (WB)** – Applicants from the six WB countries considered together submitted slightly over 15,000 applications for international protection in EU+ countries, a decrease of 8% compared to August 2015. This drop represented the second consecutive monthly fall. The number of applications from citizens of Kosovo and Bosnia grew compared to August, while the others decreased. With a share of 57%, Albanian nationals represented the largest portion of the group.

3. Number and type of decisions issued in first instance in EU+ countries

In September 2015, EU+ countries issued 53,990 decisions at first instance, an increase of 34% compared to August and 61% higher than the level recorded in September 2014. In the EU+ as a whole, the share of positive decisions was 44% of total decisions in first instance, six percentage points lower than in August 2015 reflecting the increased number of decisions issued on cases with low recognition rate (e.g.: Albania, Nigeria, Kosovo, and Serbia).

Syrians continued as the citizenship receiving the highest number of decisions at first instance. In September, EU+ countries issued 12,256 decisions on Syrian applications, 9% more than in August. Of those decisions, 97% resulted in a positive outcome, with 77% granting refugee status and 20% granting subsidiary protection. The number of decisions issued in the EU+ on Albanian cases in September sharply increased by 73% compared to August, reaching 7,961. About 99% of all first instance decisions issued to Albanians were negative.

With the exception of Serbian and Kosovar applicants, the total number of decisions issued in September to all other top 10 citizenships represented the highest monthly figures since the beginning of the year.
**Workshop “Internet security and privacy for COI researchers”**

On 27 October, EASO organised a workshop on internet security and privacy for COI researchers, an important subject when searching for sensitive data, e.g., about individual cases. The workshop was facilitated by Friedhelm Weinberg, Program Manager Eastern Europe and Asia at the Human Rights Documentation Centre (HURIDOCS) in Geneva, and is a follow-on to the EASO Conference on Online COI Research held in 2014.

The program was based on users’ needs and examples collected in a survey beforehand. A brief introduction on the concepts and issues was followed by illustrating the ways of information when doing online research. The group of 12 participants from EU+ countries (EU MS plus Norway and Switzerland), a civil society organisation and EASO were then sensitised on anonymous browsing, how to protect user accounts from being hacked, and possible ways how to communicate securely via internet. Each session comprised a brief thematic introduction followed by hands-on exercises. Participants welcomed the well-balanced mixture of theory and practice and the trainer’s talent to make this complex subject come alive and accessible.

**COI Strategic Network meeting**

On 28-29 November the sixth meeting of the EASO Strategic COI Network (StratNet) was held in Malta, attended by representatives from 24 EU+ countries, as well as UNHCR. At the meeting, EASO briefly reported and requested input from the StratNet about recent and ongoing EASO activities in the field of COI, including activities of the COI specialist networks; development of the Common European COI Portal (mock-up presentation); results of recent Practical Cooperation meetings; the COI query system; operational support in the field of COI, and recent, ongoing and planned EASO COI production.

EASO provided a brief overview of latest asylum trends in EU+ countries (EU MS plus Norway and Switzerland) and the data being collected via its Early warning and Preparedness System (EPS), followed by a discussion on possible consequences for COI research.

The StratNet had a topical discussion on the issue of origin verification/nationality checks. Participants shared national experiences with COI-based origin verification tools and explored the possibility of a more coordinated way of sharing relevant COI for this purpose.

Another topic on the agenda was the role of COI in policy development. Participants the opportunity to reconsider how EASO COI activities and deliverables could be better streamlined (in terms of scope, format, terms of reference) in order to facilitate EU+-level policy coordination.

A central discussion item at the StratNet meeting was dedicated to the impact of the current asylum crisis on the work of national COI units on the one hand, and EASO COI activities on the other hand. As part of the discussion, the possible role of COI in the hotspots and the relocation exercise was discussed.

**EASO publishes COI report on Nigeria – Sex Trafficking of Women**

Continued from page 1

A questionnaire sent to EU+ countries in June 2015, identified human trafficking for prostitution (or sex trafficking) of Nigerian women as a major issue on which information was lacking. For this reason, it was decided to produce an EASO COI report on this subject.

The report focuses on the modus operandi of the trafficking of Nigerian women to Europe for the purpose of prostitution and on the situation of the victims of trafficking returning to Nigeria. To some extent, and insofar as it relates to the modus operandi of trafficking, the report looks into the situation of Nigerian trafficked women once they have reached Europe.

In the report, the role of “madams” within the trafficking networks is highlighted, and the debt system described. Other relevant factors discussed in the report are the role of women’s relatives, and the extent in which “juju” (voodoo or witchcraft) may be used in sex trafficking. The report further examines the availability of support and reintegration for returning victims of trafficking in Nigeria, as well as the availability of state protection.

In order to provide as balanced a picture as possible, the report uses information from academic researchers, United Nations (UN) organisations, European Union (EU) agencies, non-governmental organisations and governmental agencies.

At the basis of this EASO report lies a topical report drafted by the Country Information Service of the European Refugee Fund (ERF)-funded ‘Suuntaus project’1. This initial report, entitled Human Trafficking of Nigerian Women to Europe, was finalised in March 2015. To meet the information needs of the report, a form designed for the purpose.

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1 This project aimed to identify the most significant country information themes and to better anticipate future information needs. The method consisted in systematically reviewing asylum interview protocols from specific caseloads (Nigeria, Iran, Iraq, Russia, stateless persons) by using a form designed for the purpose.
needs of a wider number of countries and maximise the added value at EU level, it was decided to include additional and up-to-date sources of information as well as new subsections and a new chapter on travel to Europe. Two rounds of peer review were carried out by COI experts from France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and by EASO. A social anthropologist specialised in the issue of human trafficking, in particular in the Nigerian context, provided expert opinion.

EASO will continue to produce COI reports on important countries of origin and to update them on a regular basis in order to raise and harmonise COI standards in the EU and use of common COI to further support the practical implementation of the Common European Asylum System.

**Quick Link**


**Workshop for Bulgarian judges and legal advisors on European law relating to asylum**

On 14-16 October, EASO, together with the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) and the Bulgarian National Institute of Justice (NIJ), organized a workshop in Sofia on European law related to asylum, border and immigration. The workshop formed part of the ongoing EASO Special Support Plan to Bulgaria. Close to 40 judges from the Supreme Administrative Court and Regional Courts, prosecutors as well as legal advisors from the State Agency for Refugees participated in the event. ECtHR and FRA presented the *Handbook on European law relating to asylum, borders and immigration*. EASO gave an overview of available resources for judges, prosecutors and legal advisors, including relevant legal analysis, practical tools, guides and COI and quality reports. Several judges from the ECtHR, the Bulgarian administrative and regional courts and the UK Upper Tribunal of Immigration and Asylum made presentations and facilitated discussions on EU/ECtHR case law in several areas covered in the Handbook, including access to territory and procedure, the right to asylum and the principle of non-refoulement, the nature and assessment of risk, exclusion from the international protection.

NIJ and EASO will continue to cooperate under the Special Support Plan to provide regular professional development opportunities and dialogue for judges, prosecutors and SAR legal advisors within Bulgaria and at an EU-level.

**New EASO Executive Director a.d. interim takes office**

Following the decision of the Management Board, Mr Jose Carreira will take up the post of Executive Director a.d. interim of EASO as from 1 November 2015.

Mr Carreira was previously EASO’s head of Administration. Throughout his career Mr Carreira has worked in senior management positions within a number of EU agencies, including FRONTEX.

He has also worked with the United Nations on humanitarian relief operations and managed operations in Europe, Africa and Asia.

Moreover, Mr Carreira is a certified auditor.
Council of the European Union reporting from the Hotspot in Italy - meet István Ördög

“My job is to set up a working environment for experts from different EU countries to process asylum cases. We are building this from scratch. You could say this is a trust-building exercise for us. We may come from different EU countries but by working side by side we realize that we have the same challenges and problems. We make a difference on the ground. I truly believe that what we are doing here right now, like providing a safe and dignified journey for the people who are in need of protection, is worth doing and worth fighting for. I believe this is a good process, good for the migrants, who are reaching their destination, but also good for us, working in this field. Being able to help people, seeing them smile when we help them, is my reward, my personal reward.”

“I remember when the first group of asylum seekers arrived, they didn’t really trust us. They didn’t know what was going to happen with them. When we informed them about the process and went through the interview and registered them, I could see the trust starting to build. Later on, I had the privilege to follow this group to the airport where they took the flight to Sweden. It was a very emotional moment for me because they recognized me and were very happy to see me there. What a difference: the first time I saw them they were very concerned and now everybody was smiling waving their goodbyes from the plane. I specifically remember two ladies, the very first ones to be registered to be relocated. I told them in the beginning: “You are going to be famous.” Of course they didn’t believe me. And then they saw the journalists and the cameras. Then they understood that they are part of history from now on.”

EASO supports the relocation process from Italy

EASO is supporting the relocation process from Italy. In this context, several EASO experts have been deployed to Italy to support the registration and relocation process. The first two group of Eritreans and Syrians have been relocated to Sweden and Finland. EASO will continue to support the relocation process in both Italy and Greece.

Karolina Marcjanik, EASO experts supporting the Registration Process
Overview of the activities and responsibilities of EASO in the Relocation process

EASO provides specific support to facilitate the overall relocation process, namely:

- Facilitate direct cooperation and exchange of information between National Contact Points (NCPs) of the Member States of Relocation and Italy and Greece;

- Monitoring of the overall relocation process;

- Development of tools in support of specific steps in the relocation procedure:
  - Standards for the information leaflets, the registration process and forms used in the relocation process.
  - Methods for vulnerability assessment, preliminary nationality checks and tracing of elements which may trigger exclusion considerations.

- Deployment and coordination of Special Support Teams and Asylum Support Teams, composed of Member States experts, to Italy and Greece.

**Greece**

In Greece EASO’s main focus is as follows:

- **Provision of information** on the asylum procedures and on the relocation procedure to the persons disembarking, in order to inform applicants of the benefits of relocation (in the hotspots) and on the asylum procedure in Greece. Operations started in Lesvos and will be gradually expanded.

- **Detecting fraudulent documents** during the registration process of applicants for international protection. The activity will consist of giving advice on existing practices, tools and techniques.

- **Matching** of applicants with the most appropriate MS of Relocation and preparing the transfer to the MS of Relocation. EASO experts will assist the units processing such files as well with regular Dublin cases. (Athens)

**Preparations for the first group to be relocated from Greece to Luxembourg**

On 15th October, EASO representatives (François Bienfait and Monique Mueller) participated in a meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Luxembourg Hon. Jean Asselborne on relocation of Syrian refugees from Greece to Luxembourg. The meeting was hosted by the Ambassador of Luxembourg to Greece, H.E Christian Biever. The Executive Director of FRONTEX, Mr Fabrice Liggeri and UNHCR representative in Greece Mrs Alessandra Morelli also participated in the meeting.

**Italy**

In Italy EASO’s main focus is as follows:

- **Provision of information** on the asylum procedures and on the relocation procedure to the persons disembarking, in order to inform applicants of the benefits of relocation (in the hotspots) and on the asylum procedure in Italy. Operations started in Lampedusa and will be gradually expanded.

- **Registration** of the application for international protection of persons eligible for relocation. This activity may include additional vulnerability assessment or preliminary nationality assessment. Operations started in Villa Sikania and will be gradually expanded.

- **Matching** of applicants with the most appropriate MS of Relocation and preparing the transfer to the MS of Relocation. EASO experts will assist the units processing such files as well with regular Dublin cases. (Rome)
They will be presented from a legal as well as practical point of view, with a clear focus on the most recent developments such as relevant jurisprudence of the Court of Justice of the EU.

The module is being developed in close cooperation with FRA and FRONTEX and it will be available for common use of all three agencies. The module should mainly target practitioners in the asylum process and reception as well as border guards. It is anticipated that the module should be finalised by the end of June 2016.

EASO Cooperation with courts and tribunals

EASO Network of Court and Tribunal Members

On October 19-20, EASO organised a meeting with a range of experts on the potential integration of a case-law database within the Information and Documentation System (IDS). Representatives of EASO’s Network of Court and Tribunal members, including the Court of Justice of the European Union and the European Court of Human Rights, as well as civil-society and NGO participants, gathered to discuss best practices and methodology for the creation of a case-law database system, which is a key aspect of EASO’s mandate.

Informative and engaging presentations on how similar databases operate, led to a robust debate on content criteria, with a focus on which national cases should be included from a CEAS perspective.

Other areas of discussion addressed how case-law summaries should be drafted, the need to ensure a well-defined target audience for IDS and the case-law database itself, as well as how to create synergies and avoid an overlap with existing databases. Though EASO’s IDS project is still at a formative stage, this event was a valuable exercise in gaining input from external experts and a good springboard for an upcoming meeting on the project with Member States, scheduled to take place early in 2016.

Vulnerable Groups

EASO Practical Workshop on Trafficking in Human Beings (THB) with a focus on Nigerian victims

On 6-7 October, EASO organised a Practical workshop on Trafficking in Human Beings with a focus on Nigerian victims. The meeting was held back to back with a Country of Origin
EASO Practical Cooperation Workshop on Nigeria

Nigeria has ranked amongst the top ten countries of origin for applicants for international protection in the EU+ in the last few years. Applications for international protection from Nigeria constitute a challenge to several EU+ states in regard COI collection and assessment of applications for international protection, in particular as concerns the question of human trafficking. For this reason, on 5 & 6 October 2015, EASO organised a COI and Policy workshop on Nigeria back to back with a meeting on Trafficking in Human Beings (THB) with a focus on Nigerian victims of THB (6-7 October).

The workshop was attended by COI researchers/analysts from EU+ countries, case workers and policy makers, UNHCR and the European Union Naval Force Mediterranean (EUNAVOR MED).

Besides an overview of the current security situation in Nigeria, the workshop focused on specific topics such as gender and cultism. A senior analyst from International Crisis Group, delivered a skype presentation from Abuja on the security situation in the Niger Delta, the Middle Belt region, Abuja and Lagos, and on the security and justice apparatus. A Professor at the French Institute of Geopolitics, gave an overview of the Boko Haram armed group (timeline, evolution, areas controlled by the group, recruitment) based on extensive research and fieldwork in Nigeria. UNHCR’s Deputy Representative in Nigeria covered several topics for which EU+ states had expressed a particular interest: the practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), secret cults, chieftancies, and internal flight alternative (IFA).

The afternoon of 6 October was dedicated to the question of THB, with a special focus on Nigeria. Two German police officers, members of the EU-level sub-project “Etutu” set up to fight Nigerian human trafficking networks, presented the modus operandi of Nigerian THB. Based on fieldwork in Nigeria, Stacey Vanderhurst, assistant professor at the University of Kansas, detailed the social and political context of women’s migration and human trafficking in Nigeria, focusing specifically on government rehabilitation programs for intercepted and returned women. The soon-to-be published EASO report on Nigeria, on the specific topic of sex trafficking, was also presented to the audience.

During the workshop, EU+ state policies and practices in regard Nigerian applications were discussed actively in an attempt to clarify divergences and identify common challenges. Moreover, recent case law, guidelines, and policies related to the processing of Nigerian victims of THB in EU+ states were shared and commented. EASO highlighted two main projects in the field of THB: The new EASO training module on “Gender, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation” in which the gender dimension of THB is addressed, as well as the training Tool on THB that EASO will start developing by the end of 2015.

More information on EASO's training is available on easo.europa.eu/about-us/tasks-of-easo/training-quality
On 29 October 2015, Finnish Minister of Interior Mr. Petteri Orpo visited the European Asylum Support Office. During the visit, Minister Orpo met with the incoming EASO ad Interim Director, Mr. Jose Carreira and a team of EASO experts to discuss EASO’s work vis-à-vis the development of the Common European Asylum System and EASO role in the Hotspots in Italy and Greece.

The two parties also discussed the various tools and activities which EASO uses to implement its tasks. These include: training and common asylum training material; common quality and common Country of Origin Information (COI); EASO operational support, on the ground, in Member States (in particular, its missions in Italy, Bulgaria, Greece and Cyprus); EASO’s support towards third-country (i.e. nonmember country) and EASO’s Early warning and Preparedness system (EPS) (using the Early warning and Preparedness System, EASO provides risk analysis of asylum influx from third countries). Moreover, Minister Orpo was given a comparative overview on the latest asylum trends in Finland and the EU+ countries.