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Section 3. EASO support to countries

"A European Asylum Support Office (the Support Office) is hereby established in order to help to improve the implementation of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), to strengthen practical cooperation among Member States on asylum and to provide and/or coordinate the provision of operational support to Member States subject to particular pressure on their asylum and reception systems."

EASO Founding Regulation, Article 1

The year 2020 marks the 10th anniversary of the establishment of EASO. On the basis of its founding regulation which entered into force on 19 June 2010, EASO quickly became operational in its main areas of work. The agency's primary mandate focuses on improving the implementation of CEAS, strengthening practical cooperation on asylum among Member States, and providing operational support to Member States experiencing particular pressure on their asylum and reception systems. Within that mandate and under its motto "Support is our mission", EASO delivers results which are organised around operational support, training and asylum knowledge that constitute the main pillars of its organisational structure.

To contribute to the development of CEAS, EASO gathers and exchanges relevant information on the implementation of the instruments of the asylum acquis, including information on the processing of asylum applications, respective legislation and case law. Throughout the year, EASO publishes reports on the situation of asylum in the EU and technical documents on the implementation of the EU asylum instruments, including guidelines and operating manuals.

Supporting practical cooperation entails the exchange of information and the identification of best practices among Member States, with the work on country of origin information aiming to foster convergence in decision-making. Training support provided by EASO targets national administrations, courts and tribunals through a dedicated asylum curriculum, while practical cooperation in the area of the external dimension promotes capacity-building in third countries and resettlement programmes.

Operational support to Member States whose asylum and reception systems are under pressure is an area of EASO's work that has significantly expanded in scope over the last 10 years. The first operational support plan – with Greece – was signed in April 2011, and since then, operational support in various forms has been provided to Sweden, Luxembourg, Bulgaria, Italy, Cyprus, Malta (in chronological order) and finally Spain in 2020. By the end of 2020, EASO had a strong presence in all main frontline Member States, providing wide-scale support in a number of areas.

Since 2015, EASO has been engaged – alongside the European Commission and other European agencies – in carrying out the goals of the European Agenda on Migration, including providing support to the hotspots approach, ad hoc disembarkations and internal relocations.

In its daily work, EASO acts as an independent centre of expertise on asylum, working in partnership with asylum authorities in Member States, other relevant national services and European institutions and agencies. As part of the EU Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) network, EASO works regularly in close cooperation with the other eight agencies in managing security, justice, fundamental rights and gender equality. EASO also collaborates closely with the UNHCR and other international organisations, while the Consultative Forum provides a platform to exchange information with civil society partners.

As part of the CEAS reform, the European Commission presented a proposal on 6 April 2016 for a new regulation to transform the European Asylum Support Office into a fully-fledged EU Asylum Agency (EUAA). It recommended to strengthen EASO's existing mandate to undertake additional activities related to:

- A clear and functional process to determine which country is responsible for examining an application for protection;
- A role in developing the reference key and operating the corrective allocation mechanism under a reformed Dublin system;
- Strengthening practical cooperation and information-exchange between Member States;
- Promoting EU law and operational standards related to asylum procedures, reception conditions and protection needs;
- Ensuring greater convergence in the assessment of applications for international protection across the EU through analyses of and guidance on the situation in countries of origin; and
- Monitoring the application of CEAS and providing Member States with the necessary operational and technical assistance, in particular in situations of disproportionate pressure.

This proposal also forms part of the Pact on Migration and Asylum, presented by the European Commission in
September 2020, when it called for the European Parliament and Council to adopt the regulation on the EU Asylum Agency.

Since March 2020, the challenging circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic across Europe and globally contributed to an increased need for safe, stable and robust asylum and reception systems. Despite an overall drop in applications for international protection at the EU level, some countries received a substantial number of arrivals, straining their resources. Against the backdrop of constant pressure on asylum and reception systems, EASO's activities were directly aimed at assisting Member States in the context of the pandemic. This included ensuring business continuity, carrying on a seamlessly with training activities and facilitating meetings online among Member States.

EASO launched a dedicated information collection initiative to provide key stakeholders with updated, comprehensive and reliable information on the impact of COVID-19 on national asylum and reception systems, emergency measures which were set in place, and the roll-out plan for vaccinating asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection. A number of thematic reports which analysed how countries coped and reacted were issued,[240] and information was made available to Member States through online databases. To ensure high standards in processing asylum applications during the pandemic, EASO issued practical recommendations on conducting personal interviews remotely and on conducting remote/online registrations.

In EASO's operational work, activities were swiftly adapted in line with security, health and safety protocols to limit face-to-face contact (for example, during registration and asylum interviews) and tasks were adjusted to the new reality. The health measures prompted the focus to shift to back-office workflows, such as working on the backlog of files; administrative duties in registration; producing country of origin information; providing support to appeals; capacity-building activities; improving policy and procedures; and remotely supporting information provision and reception through helplines.

At the same time, EASO remained active on the ground and helped to relocate unaccompanied children from Greece to other Member States. Support to Spain was also agreed in late 2020 and launched in 2021 to alleviate the pressure on its reception system and develop a new reception model.

The detailed description of EASO's activities in 2020 can be consulted in the EASO Annual General Report 2020.

10 years of information on asylum



[xiii] The JHA network of agencies includes EASO, Frontex, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), EMCDDA, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), Europol, CEPOL, eu-LISA and Eurojust.

[240] European Asylum Support Office. (2020, May 7). *EASO Special Report: Asylum Trends and COVID-19*. /sites/default/files/easo-special-report-asylum-covid.pdf; European Asylum Support Office. (2020, June 11). *EASO Special Report: Asylum Trends and COVID-19: Issue 2*. /sites/default/files/easo-special-report-asylum-covid-june-2020.pdf; European Asylum Support Office. (2020, June 2). *COVID-19 emergency measures in asylum and reception systems*. /sites/default/files/covid19-emergency-measures-asylum-reception-systems.pdf; European Asylum Support Office. (2020, July 15). *COVID-19 emergency measures in asylum and reception systems: Issue No. 2*. /sites/default/files/publications/covid19-emergency-measures-asylum-reception-systems-issue-2.pdf; European Asylum Support Office. (2020, December 7). *COVID-19 emergency measures in asylum and reception systems: Issue No. 3*. /sites/default/files/publications/COVID-19%20emergency%20measures%20in%20asylum%20and%20reception%20systems-December-2020_new.pdf

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