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Introduction

> Facing an 11 % increase in the number of applications for international protection lodged in Europe in 2019, countries responded to changing migratory patterns by introducing new measures or practices throughout the year to ensure effective implementation of the European asylum acquis. Some countries, such as Cyprus, France, Greece, Malta and Spain, received more asylum applicants in 2019 than during the migration crisis of 2015. Urgent measures were put in place to address an influx of migrants, disembarkations and rising backlogs of pending cases, while endeavouring to protect the rights of asylum seekers and share responsibility amongst Member States.

As the go-to source of information on international protection in Europe, the *EASO Asylum Report* series provides a comprehensive overview each year of key developments in asylum in European Union Member States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland (EU+ countries). All aspects of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) are covered step by step by summarising changes to legislation, policy and practice at the European and national levels. The report presents selected case law which has shaped the interpretation of European and national laws, as well as key indicators for the 2019 reference year which highlight emerging trends and measure the effectiveness of asylum systems.

Global, European and national trends and events shaped developments in asylum in 2019. To set the scene, Section 1 presents an overview of forced displacement globally. It addresses the international community's response to large refugee movements and zooms in on two topics gaining attention on the world stage: statelessness and displacement due to environmental factors. The section also presents the outcomes of the first Global Refugee Forum, which was organised in December 2019 to build solidarity between refugees and host countries.

Section 2 narrows in on the context in the European Union, presenting the evolution of CEAS and major developments in legislation and policy at the EU level. The new European Commission kept migration high among its priorities and the section provides updates on building a more structured solution for disembarkations through the Central Mediterranean route. It details EU initiatives under the European Agenda on Migration and jurisprudence by the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU) in the area of international protection.

As the centre of expertise on asylum, EASO provides technical and operational assistance to Member States to manage the influx of applicants and share best practices. Section 3 outlines the role EASO plays in building capacity and fostering the exchange of information. It describes the agency's key partnerships and work with third countries to establish or reinforce their national asylum systems s. Projects under EASO's umbrella, which cultivate a harmonised approach across Europe to address international protection needs, are described.

The overall number of asylum applications increased in 2019 but different stories unfolded at the country level. Some asylum and reception systems were heavily taxed, while other countries handled far fewer cases than in 2018. Section 4 presents the latest published data on key indicators to identify and monitor trends in countries receiving asylum applicants and countries of origin. It outlines the main trends in applications received, countries of origin of applicants, withdrawn applications, decisions on applications and pending cases. A special sub-section looks deeper into socio-economic indicators which can influence trends in asylum.

Sections 5 and 6 take an in-depth look into specific areas of asylum in Europe: the Dublin procedure which sets out the criteria and mechanisms to determine the Member State which is responsible for an application for international protection, and vulnerable groups. The sections combine quantitative, qualitative and legal information, as well as key indicators, to provide the current state of play on two complex topics. The section on vulnerable applicants focuses in particular on unaccompanied minors, reviewing changes to reception conditions, guardianship and procedures throughout the asylum process.

And finally, Section 7 analyses developments in each EU+ country and how countries shaped their legislation and policies throughout 2019. The section covers each stage of the asylum procedure, including access to procedure and information, legal assistance, interpretation services, special procedures, procedures for first and second applications, reception conditions, detention, country of origin information, the content of protection, return of former applicants and resettlement. As seen in this section, countries focused on different areas at the national level with the aim of building sustainable systems.

To bring diverse perspectives together in one place, observations by civil society organisations and other partners are presented throughout the report by topic. In 2019, their concerns mainly centred around access to procedure, reception conditions and criteria for the detention of applicants. Throughout the sections, relevant case law is also described as national courts continued to interpret a wide range of aspects related to CEAS.

The report serves as a main reference for developments in asylum in EU+ countries. It collates a wide range of sources to provide accurate information to policymakers, national asylum authorities, researchers and practitioners involved in the field of asylum.

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